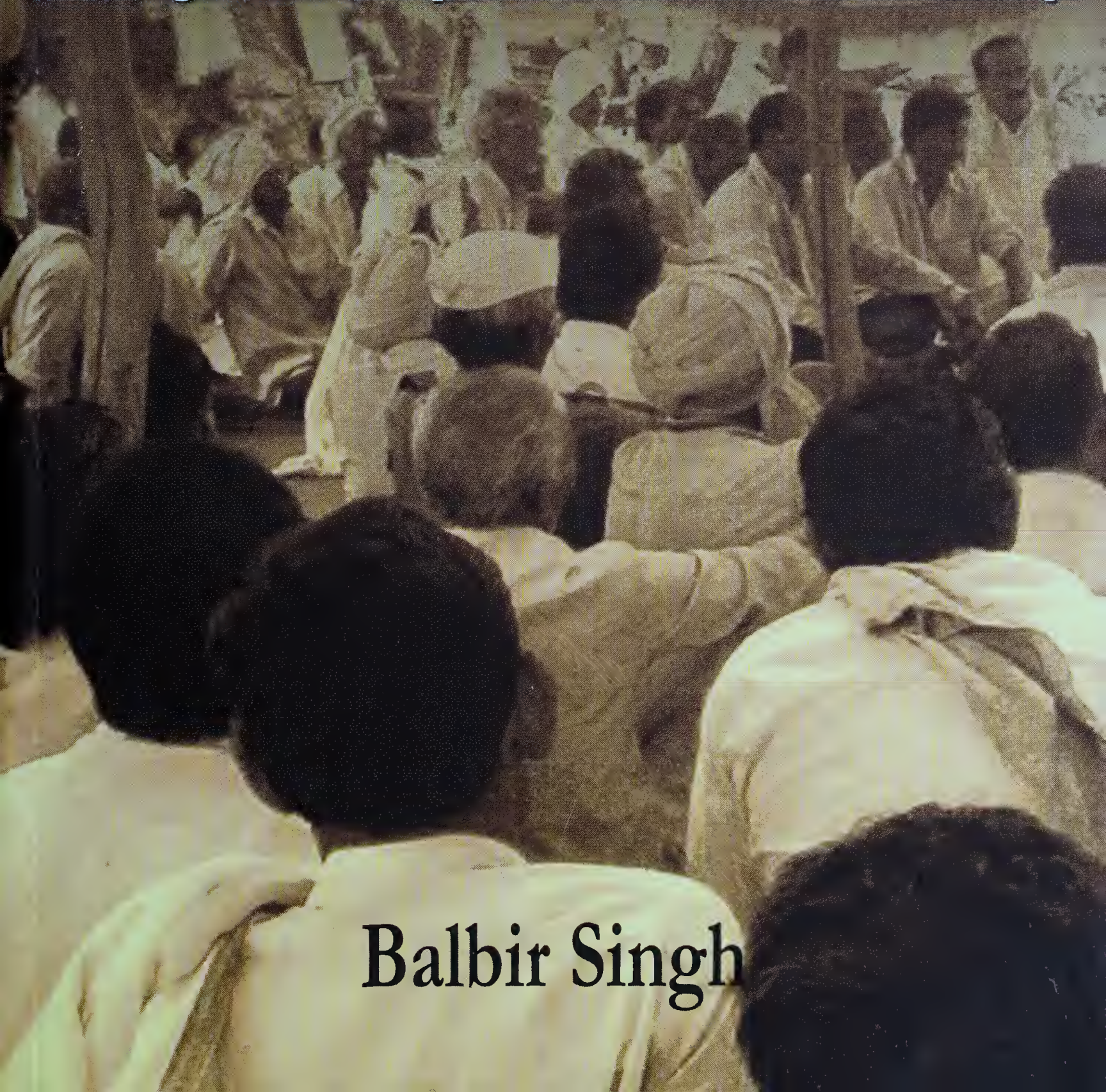





SIR CHHOTU RAM

A Saga of Inspirational Leadership



Balbir Singh



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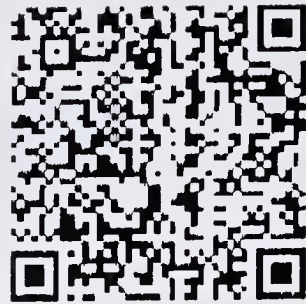
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Balbir Singh



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Preface

The birth of a great man is generally for the cries of his times. So was Chhotu Ram's. Like others in the family, he was born and brought up in circumstances that were utterly deficient in responding to his urges and aspirations. At a fairly advanced age of ten, he was despatched to school not that he would study but that the family could heave a sigh of relief from his daylong mischiefs. A genius extraordinary, here he surprised his teachers and classmates by grabbing the first position in his primary school examination in 1895, and was found eligible for a scholarship. Nor was his performance in the elite Christian institutions of Delhi less surprising where he was adjudged the best student both in studies and leadership qualities. As a lawyer, he set the rare example of providing free legal counselling to peasants who had been victims of greedy moneylenders.

It was Chhotu Ram's settled conviction that, if at all afflicted peasants in the Punjab, as elsewhere, were to be saved, the only panacea was political power. To pursue his avowed aim, he joined the District Congress Committee as its President, but within a short period of four years he felt completely disillusioned. The urbanites had captured almost the entire organization, with little care or concern for ruralites. With skilful maneuverability, they were busy in strengthening their hold and trying to preach and propagate the Congress demand for refusal to pay land revenue and other taxes to the

government. The peasants were also asked to keep their fields lying vacant. With an anguished mind Chhotu Ram wrote: “The Punjab Provincial Congress Committee has adopted a secretarian attitude in its memorandum, has wholly identified itself with the urban and commercial classes and deals with the rights and claims of the rural population as if the latter formed no part of the Indian nation and should be content with such crumbs of political rights and privileges as their urban—shall I say—masters be pleased to throw over to them”.

Chhotu Ram severed his relation with the Congress, but this was not the end but the beginning of a new eventful era to be mostly dedicated to the peasantry of the British Punjab. Through his own means he reached the top of his new political party—the Unionist Party—and later as the most influential member of the cabinet, through which he sought to realize his most cherished ambition. With carefully planned and executed agrarian reforms he had almost liberated the Punjab peasantry before his death in January 1945. It was all something like a miracle that the age-old complex and complicated problem of land ownership and management had been resolved once and for all. These reforms have not ceased to be relevant even today, though they are becoming increasingly obscure with the passage of time. Needless to say, his untimely demise made the Muslim League’s partition demand much easier for acceptance. Notwithstanding all this, however, he remains even to this day little studied and little understood.

Chhotu Ram warned through his public speeches and writings that partition would irretrievably damage the Punjabi society and destroy the whole way of life. His was the lone voice to tell Jinnah in unequivocal and categorical terms that

Punjab was no one community's home or heritage, but a mini commonwealth in which every community was an equal partner. A country divided, he once remarked, was a country destroyed. The letter he addressed to Mahatma Gandhi is a rare piece of prophetic forebodings, and deserves serious evaluation not just because of its forceful logic but also because of its vivid description of future course of events - forcible conversions, large scale murders, rapes, abductions and unbearable sufferings caused in the wake of exchange of population on both sides. All this was, to be sure, an earth-shaking tragedy ever known to human history. All this, however, unmistakably points to the failure of collective human wisdom, foresight and understanding.

The whopping wails of the beleaguered peasantry aroused Chhotu Ram's conscience to a point where he could think of no other pursuit, not even the Chief Ministership of Jammu and Kashmir or the membership of the Viceroy's Executive Council. He was neither preceded nor has he been followed by anyone else as the committed champion of peasantry. He was undoubtedly influenced by his heritage, his education and social conditions. Communalism was in his view, humanity's 'enemy' number one. The Punjab's communal composition presented the warning that only a Muslim could be its premier. And Chhotu Ram's insights accepted this warning with clear understanding. He was a zealous defender of the country's unity and integrity and that is why he always finds his place in a class unique in itself.

Let me here sound a note of caution in order to enable the reader to have a clear grasp of the meaning and implication of the term 'zamindar' on which stands the entire edifice of Chhotu Ram's thought and action. We shall here note that the

issue or land ownership and management has had a chequered history over the ages. For their convenience, the British administrators created 'states', with well defined territorial limits, to be governed by a highly privileged class of aristocrats called 'maharajas'. Next in hierarchy was a less privileged class - the 'rajas' who were allowed their rule to extend to a cluster of villages. Like the maharajas, the class of rajas was also authorized to collect land revenue and manage their estates in their own way, often called 'zamindars' or landlords. But there was another class of landowners who were neither privileged in any conceivable sense of the term, nor even free to do things as they liked to. These cultivators were called 'zamindars', who formed a distinct and distinguishable class or poor people with no facilities for rural credit. Throughout the whole of his speeches and writings Chhotu Ram used the term zamindar in this sense.

I shall conclude the Preface with the plea that my aim has been rather selective but I hope not partial or in any way one sided, and to safeguard against this I have quoted Chhotu Ram wherever and whenever desirable. Whilst this could be somewhat wearisome to those already familiar with the subject, it could perhaps be welcomed by those who want to be acquainted with the broad outlines of his thoughts and deeds.

I remain grateful to the Late Chaudhary Priya Vrat, my esteemed friend and philosopher who till his death in December 2006 continued to help me in many ways, especially in the supply of the material needed for the present work. I would also like to record here my deep sense of appreciation for the help rendered by my son, K.M. Singh and grandson R.P. Singh, both practicing lawyers in the Delhi courts, in

giving the manuscript its present book-form. I may also express my deep sense of gratitude to those whose works I have consulted and referred to in the book. My chief aim in writing this book is admirably brought out by Pliny the Younger in the Epistles: 'I hold it a noble task to rescue from oblivion those who deserve to be remembered'.

Balbir Singh

Deenbandhu Chhotu Ram Birthplace Trust (Regd.)
Garm Sampla, Distt. Rohtak, Haryana
24th November 2008

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Abbreviations

BG.	—	Bhagavad-Gita
CMG.	—	Civil and Military Gazette.
CRC.	—	Pardaman Singh, Chhotu Ram in the Eyes of His Contemporaries.
CRSW.	—	Balbir Singh, Sir Chhotu Ram : Selected Speeches and Writings.
CRV.	—	D.C. Verma, Sir Chhotu Ram: Life and Times.
FH.	—	Azim Hussain, Fazl-i-Hussain : A Political Biography.
JG.	—	Jat Gazette.
HT.	—	The Hindustan Times.
KT.	—	Ian Talbot, Khizr Tiwana.
PLA.	—	Proceedings of Punjab Legislative Assembly.
PLC.	—	Proceedings of Punjab Legislative Council.
SCR.	—	Madan Gopal, Sir Chhotu Ram: A Political Biography.
SFH.	—	Syed Nur Ahmad, Mian Fazl-i-Hussain: A Review of His Life and Work.
vol.	—	volume.

The Travails of Early Life

No argument is needed to convince us today that it is the agricultural sector which for centuries has commanded a central place in planning and shaping the economy of our country. Obviously, in an agro-based economy, like ours, it is the peasant who figures prominently and asserts his right whenever and wherever he can, to be treated fairly, in weal or woe. This is precisely what our various political parties have been advocating day in day out, almost *ad nauseum*. But as we know, there were times when no such parties existed to espouse the peasant's cause for a fair deal, no laws to protect and promote his rights and no official agency or mechanism to enforce these rights. Instances could be easily quoted to show that even might was justified as right. One could justly wonder how under such circumstances the poor peasantry managed to survive and remain active, much like a wall clock that ceaselessly moves on without knowing why. While, however, the pages of history of bygone ages are replete with accounts of exploitation, humiliation and even torture of this class. On no page thereof can we decipher the name of a more committed champion than that of Chhotu Ram, a celebrated messiah of peasantry who sought to transform the entire rural society into a living social organism in the pre-partition Punjab.

Those were the Days

When we cast our glance at the history of our national plans, projects and priorities over the last one hundred and fifty years—that is, from the time India came under the British Crown in 1858 to the present day—what seems to have been blatantly and consistently ignored is agriculture, and nothing but that. Almost every successive government has tried to convince itself that agriculture as a vocation is exclusively the agriculturist's own concern—what he grows, how he grows and when he grows. We should not be surprised to be told that it has not attracted any sound investment. The peasant could not afford to keep more than two bullocks which helped him plough his landholdings, draw water from the well and carry the agricultural produce in the market. Almost every member of the family lent his or her helping hand in operations like sowing, harvesting, threshing and looking after the cattle. Even the female members had to share the work that was entrusted to them on the fields. With no flour mills anywhere, they had to get up early in the morning and take to grinding the food grains into flour, both for men and animals. With no schools around education had no place for them. Agriculture was the sole source of livelihood and people knew how to do it. It provided employment to all males as well as females. There were songs and dance parties which provided entertainment to the weary peasants at their night programmes. Wrestling competitions were organised on special occasions which attracted people from far and wide. One of the prominent features of the rural society was the joint family system. In a paper, 'Life In An Indian Village' Chhotu Ram Wrote: "This is a legacy left to us by our ancestors. to which we have adhered with remarkable tenacity.

The tendency of the modern civilization is not to emphasise the importance of the individual. But the traditions of India make the individual merge into the family. Notably in the country the old patriarchal system is still in force. The will of the eldest male is the law and such a law is at times purely arbitrary. He is the *de facto* master of the whole joint property; He receives and spends all the income received from the property in the way he thinks best and he transacts all business in the name of the family. Generally, his authority is never questioned, but even if it is, such is the force of the custom that the man who questions it will have to give way and draw the wrath of the village public opinion on him". The joint family system provided a collective labour force which undertook to do such things as sowing, harvesting, etc. With commitment to the good of the family as a whole, every member contributed to the best of his or her capacity. The system accounted for the unity and prosperity of the family and its status in the society.

But in most cases the simple, unlettered peasant easily succumbed to temptations and pressures of various social customs, traditions and practices and unsuspectingly brought about his own financial ruin. This generally happened at the time when a marriage ceremony was to be solemnized. Blinded by the irresistible pressure of his social group he indulged in reckless spending forcing him to mortgage a part or even the whole of his landholdings. If this was not possible he knocked at the moneylender's door and agreed to take a loan on terms and conditions dictated by the creditor. His children, he knew, were ill-clad and ill-fed and thus he saved money by denying himself even the basic necessities of life. But when the unruly impulse came upon him with

its full sway, he wasted it in no time. Most peasants were poor because they could not keep themselves within their means or resources.

The havoc frequently caused by natural calamities was another reason for the peasant's woes. If in one season his crops were destroyed by drought, in another they were harmed by devastating floods. The loss caused by swarms of locusts and hailstorms was no less damaging. What appeared as a green, full grown crop was uprooted and thrown on the field scattered in the twinkling of an eye. The poor peasant became still poorer cursing his luck. But he was determined to begin the lifecycle afresh, believing that hardwork alone could compensate this loss.

What has preceded should suffice to convince us that the troubles of the peasants arose because he had no resources of his own. Even a slight variation in his meagre finances could spell doom and gloom upon him. If there was anything at his disposal it was his land which he could sell, but only to die of starvation. The institution of cooperative societies sprang into existence towards the end or 1935, by which time rural indebtedness in the Punjab had reached alarming proportions. "If you meet a peasant in Northern India, for example and ask him who he is, he will probably reply, I am a poor man, a zamindar"¹. Here is our typical zamindar who becomes the hero of the pathetic story Chhotu Ram told in his serial writings under the caption 'Bechara Zamindar', who shall meet us in a subsequent chapter.

It was Chhotu Ram's settled conviction, however, that, if poverty was to be banished from India root and branch,

¹B.H. Baden Powell, *The Land Systems of British India*, vol. ii (Delhi, 1974)

exploitation of peasantry must end forthwith. The peasant produced food grains on his fields and fed others, but he himself remained hungry. His children were seen wrapped in rags. Seldom did they have good clothes and good food. Education was a dream never to be transformed into reality. They were destined to be poor, uneducated and exploited.

The helpless peasant turned his attention to the village moneylender—the proverbial Shylock—who was at liberty to squeeze out as much of blood from his victim’s body as he liked to. No appeal for compassion or mercy once the peasant had stepped into his house. What Chhotu Ram often sought to guard against was the fear of emergence or a swashbuckling new rich class whose lifestyle reflected the unchecked growth of black money. The moneylenders belonged to this class. On the contrary, Chhotu Ram added, there are “those teaming millions who are strangers to two square meals a day whose back seldom knows a clean shirt, who have to go about perhaps barefooted in the burning sun”².

With no rival rural financing agency around, the moneylender in most cases charged interest at 12% per annum only in those cases where the recovery was safe and easy; but where the chances of recovery were not bright the interest rate could go up to 24% or even 30% where there was no other door open to the needy peasant. The creditor often manipulated his accounts in his own inimitable way. Being illiterate and needy, the peasant could easily agree to the terms and conditions offered by the creditor. The incidence of indebtedness in the Punjab assumed serious proportions with each passing year. It has been on record that the total

² PLC, vol. xxv, p.326 (1934)

debt in the Punjab increased from Rupees Ninety Crores in 1921 to Rupees One Hundred Thirty Five Crores in 1930³. In his book, *'The Punjab Peasant In Prosperity And Debt'*, Darling was loud and clear in describing the agonising situation when he wrote, "Bulk of the cultivators are born in debt, live in debt and die in debt."³ The position was no better in subsequent years. However, with the passage of time alienations and transfers of land reached an alarming stage. In fact, all that was happening was the outcome not of apathy or indifference of the British policymakers but of a premeditated conspiracy to teach peasantry a lesson for its hostile attitude towards those Britishers who sought shelter during the 1857 uprising.

If lands were allowed to pass into the moneylender's hands it could well spell disaster. In that case there could be food shortage which meant starvation deaths not only in the Punjab but in the entire country. It could well result in anarchy and the consequent discredit to the British rule in India. It was also evident that a disgruntled peasantry could not provide the requisite number of recruits for the army. To tide over this impasse the British brought forward a legislation, The Punjab Alienation of Land Act, which came into force in June 1901. The Act stipulated that a non-agriculturist could not purchase or in any other way acquire, an agriculturist's land, except by way of mortgage for a maximum period of twenty years, on the expiry of which the mortgaged land would return to its rightful owner, unencumbered. The peasantry heaved a sigh of relief, while the British took it as an important milestone in bringing stability in the province.

³ Himadri Banerjee, *Agrarian Survey of the Punjab* – Delhi, 1983 - p.84

After the lions had taken their share of feast, it was now the turn of the jackals to rest content with the residual. Some affluent sections amongst the peasantry came forward to fill up the schism caused by the implementation of the Act⁴. They employed even sharper razors in fleecing their unwary customers. Their rates knew no bounds, depending upon the urgency of the customer's needs. They did not bother much about the risk factor, for they were confident of recovering all their dues. They had established contacts with court officials who helped them for a price.

The British administration took more stringent measures to protect the peasant's interests by resorting to 'The Punjab Registration of Moneylenders Act', 'The Punjab Regulation of Accounts Act', etc. All such Acts did help in checking the menace of increasing indebtedness in the Punjab.

The Shameful Part of Chronicle

The cunning and rapacious moneylenders had devised their own mechanism of recovery and they could go to any extent in their objective. For instance where the chances of recovery were doubtful or dim, they would visit the house of their debtor for the purpose or ensuring execution of the court decree, accompanied by an official, either on a festival day or on an occasion when there was some special event, such as a marriage ceremony when friends and relations gathered at the debtor's house. The decree holder was well assured that the very sight of the court official would so terribly shake his mind that he would run helter-skelter to arrange on-the-spot payment of the money, or alternatively,

⁴ Some non-agriculturist moneylenders acquired land in rural areas by what has come to be known as "benami" transaction

produce someone on the occasion who would stand surety for him and undertake responsibility for repayment by a certain fixed date. Still more result-oriented was the trick, often employed by the decree holder, to hold out threat of arrest by getting the bailiffs certificate to the effect that the judgement-debtor had offered resistance so as to render the decree ineffectual.

The moneylender, if he happened to be a shopkeeper, employed his own *modus operandi*.

The worst of it all was that he used false weights and measures. He used one set of weights and measures when he gave food grains like wheat, to his debtor and others and quite another set when he received such articles from his debtor or from others. Obviously, in the former case he gave less, while in the latter he took away more. All this was easy for him to augment his daily income which sometimes ran into thousands.

The Banking Inquiry Committee found that the shopkeepers used false weights and measures even while dealing with ordinary customers who were not indebted to them. The Report of the Committee said that out of 2717 weights checked, 1164 or 42% were detected to be incorrect. Scales, the Report goes on, were found to be even more incorrect—out of 1407 tested in five districts, 60% were found to be inaccurate. “The enormous economic disadvantage to which the debtor was subjected by his ‘sahukar’ in consequence of the usages practices and tricks mentioned above, is a factor the significance of which can hardly be exaggerated.”⁵

⁵ Ch. Chhotu Ram’s article, titled ‘Indebtedness in the Punjab’ reproduced in CRSW, pp.231-43; SCR, pp.162-79

Early Life and Education

The birth of the third male child, Ram Richpal, on 24th November 1881, nicknamed Chhotu, because of his being the youngest in Sukhi Ram's small family residing in village Garhi-Sampla of Rohtak District of the present day Haryana State, was no special occasion for rejoicing. Guided by the prevalent view that the son of a zamindar has virtually to step into his father's shoes, Chhotu Ram, while yet a student, was married to Gyano Devi, daughter of an agriculturist of Kheri Jat village, Jhajjar District of Haryana. Gyano Devi was blessed with the birth of two daughters, Bhagwani Devi and Ram Pyari, who preferred to remain devoted housewives. Curiously enough, it was the age when the birth of a male child was considered most auspicious. Accordingly, some misguided people approached Chhotu Ram in later years with the plea for his remarriage. Chhotu Ram politely told them that not one son but he had quite a number of sons who were getting scholarships from his salary and were being prepared for a good career. Among the recipients were students of different castes and communities: Jats, Ahirs, Harijans and even the Nobel Laureate Dr. Abdus Salam, who shall figure prominently in a subsequent chapter. His daughter Bhagwani Devi's son, Birender Singh, is a prominent Congress leader in the Haryana State. With no adequate cultivable land at his disposal, Sukhi Ram assigned to Chhotu odd duties. like cattle grazing, supply of seeds during the sowing season, carrying food for the men at work, etc. When he grew up he was 'got admitted into a primary school at Sampla. It was the year 1891, and the boy's name was registered by the teacher as Chhotu Ram. Strange as it may seem, the apparently looking rustic and ill-mannered, Chhotu

became the talk of the town when he topped the list of successful candidates in the primary school examination conducted by the Education Department of Rohtak District in 1895 winning a scholarship of four rupees per month. Now there was no excuse for Sukhi Ram to deny his son the right to higher studies at Jhajjar, about 12 miles from Garhi. Chhotu Ram sought admission in a middle school which had no hostel. He hired a small room and began to work still harder so as to show better results. Articles of daily consumption, like flour, ghee, vegetables, etc. he brought from home, covering the entire journey on foot almost every Saturday. This time he was placed second in the merit list of successful candidates who took the middle school examination conducted by the Punjab University, Lahore, in 1899. This time too he was found eligible for the scholarship.

But all this did not mean much for Sukhi Ram who had not even repaid the debt he had taken sometime back. Also, he did not like that his son went to a distant place like Delhi. However, he felt extremely distressed on seeing the tearful eyes of his son who was taken to the family's creditor, Ghasi Ram, to seek his advice and help. The moneylender told Sukhi Ram that a middle pass education was good enough for a Jat boy and that he could easily get the post a village patwari or a police constable knowing little that the boy would one day decide the fate of thousands of patwaris. This was the kind of an advice which suited Sukhi Ram down to the ground.

However, Chhotu Ram was hellbent upon continuing his studies further. He did not yield to any pressure or persuasion and at long last he persuaded his uncle, Raje Ram,

to support him financially for sometime. The boy got himself admitted in the St. Stephen's High School at Delhi where he was able to get a freeship and a monthly stipend for six rupees in recognition of his excellent performance in the middle school examination. He had learnt to live within his means, draw his books from the school library and with greater vigour and perseverance he threw himself into his studies. That was how he soon managed to be in the good books of his teachers. But at times he demonstrated innate capacity for leadership. An opportunity came when the sweeper of the school became unduly arrogant towards the students. Chhotu Ram rose to the occasion and organised a peaceful sit-in strike of the students. The argumentative skills displayed by him in peacefully settling the dispute fully convinced the school authorities that there was justification for the cause which he was spearheading. For all this he was affectionately nicknamed 'General Roberts'. He passed his high school examination with credit in 1901.

Chhotu Ram joined the St. Stephen's College, but soon his health began to show signs of deterioration. Without disclosing the nature of his ailment to anyone he went to live in his village. He was much upset because he had no financial source to help him in his studies. Soon his continued absence from the college came to the notice of Principal Wright. Two teachers, S.K.Rudra and Raghubar Dayal, accompanied by some students familiar with the area were sent to persuade Chhotu Ram to return to his studies. The college authorities assured him of all possible help and he resumed his studies with even greater vigour and application. He passed his intermediate examination in 1903 with good marks.

If Chhotu Ram's studies were hampered by financial constraints, there was the invisible hand of destiny to pull him out. He was always inspired with the vision of a bright future which he thought he could realise only through hardwork and unswerving faith in God. During his college life he had been adjudged the best student in Sanskrit and English Literature. 'Arise, Awake, Realise the good things of life by aspiring after them'⁶. An ardent admirer of Swami Vivekananda, Chhotu Ram often repeated his immortal words: 'Stop not till the goal is reached'⁷. How could destiny turn its back upon a person bent upon moving heaven and earth for the realisation for his noble mission! While going to Lahore to seek admission to the graduate course in the local DAV College, Chhotu Ram chanced to meet at the Ghaziabad railway station one of the great philanthropists of his times, Seth Chhaju Ram (1861-1943). A Calcutta-based businessman, Chhaju Ram was highly impressed not merely by what Chhotu Ram had done before amidst abject poverty and privation, but by what he planned to do in future. Chhaju Ram advised the young boy for studies in Sanskrit and promised him all financial help so long as he needed it. For certain unavoidable reasons Chhotu Ram joined the St. Stephen's College at Delhi from where he graduated in 1905. Chhotu Ram called Chhaju Ram his god-father (dharampita). Chhaju Ram was close to Indian luminaries like Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Subash Chandra Bose and many others for his liberal donations. A bungalow in Civil Lines area of Rohtak city was got built by Chhaju Ram for Chhotu Ram's personal use, popularly known as Neeli Kothi

⁶ *Katha Upanishad* I, III, 1

⁷ *A Call To The Nation*, p. 28

or Prem Niwas. A college at Hissar (Haryana) is the only memorial which his admirers, legions of them, have built after his demise.

Chhotu Ram was a keen observer of people and events. The following words he noted down in his diary about his classmates during his stay in Delhi deserve special mention here. ‘My seven years of stay at Delhi brought me into close contact with students from the highly cultured families of Delhi society. My relations with them were entirely cordial. But in friendly banter these urban comrades always styled their school and college fellows from the countryside as rustics, clowns and pumpkins. Jats came in for a particularly heavy dose of these epithets. These epithets were used in a perfectly good humour, with no desire to hurt and no conscious sting behind them. But it will be idle to pretend that they did not proceed from an under-current of feeling which though innocent in appearance, had a vein of disrespect and disdain for my class’.

In Search of a Job

After doing his graduation in 1905, Chhotu Ram was called upon to shoulder the responsibilities that had devolved upon him following his father’s death. He knew it well that his father had left behind a debt that had to be paid at an early opportunity to frustrate the malicious design of the moneylender to grab the family land. He now felt called upon to take up some job. He was well assured that his college teacher, C.F. Andrews, was in a position to bail him out of his predicament. Andrews was highly impressed by Chhotu Ram’s paper titled ‘Life in an Indian Village’, published in

the inaugural issue of the College magazine, *The Stephenian*, in 1907. He took Chhotu Ram to his friend, Sir Robert Carlyle's house, then, Finance Member on the Viceroy's Council. Carlyle was highly impressed by the theme and contents of the paper and asked Andrews to meet Mr. Walker who was Financial Commissioner and was competent enough to nominate a suitable hand to the post of Extra Assistant Commissioner to PCS cadre. The British bureaucrat was unduly proud of his newly acquired knowledge of Urdu and this was for him a good opportunity to try his hand on the young Indian before him. The bureaucrat thought that the boy would greet him with expressions like 'mai-baap', 'hazoor-e-ala', 'ann-data', 'bande-nawaz', etc. Chhotu Ram did nothing of the sort and this must have annoyed the bureaucrat beyond repair. The young aspirant started answering the questions put to him in English with confidence and clarity. 'Chhokra', Walker said, 'Kya tum Urdu nahin jaanta hai'? (don't you know Urdu?, was the question Walker put to Chhotu Ram). The candidate shot back by saying 'main Urdu janta hoon, aur acchi tarah janta hoon, lekin aap shayad nahin jante hain, isliye main yeh accha nahin samajhta hoon ke aisi zabaan main aapse guftgoo karoon jis ka aapko ilm na ho' (I know Urdu well and know it very well but I think you don't know Urdu well; therefore I deem it proper that I should not talk in a language with which you are not familiar). Chhotu Ram did not accept the post of a Nayab Tehsildar offered to him.

Just around this time Chhotu Ram came across an advertisement for the post of assistant private secretary which Raja Ram Pal Singh, the ruler of a small state, Kalakankar, in Pratap Garh district of U.P., wanted for himself. The Raja

was a nominated member of the Legislative Council of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. As such, he wielded considerable influence in almost the entire province. Surrounded by the river Ganga, Kalakankar presented an enchanting scene which captivated Chhotu Ram in his new surroundings. Its total population did not exceed a thousand and those who were in the service of the Raja had been provided dwellings on the campus. Chhotu Ram accepted the job on a consolidated salary of forty rupees per month. Besides taking notes from the Raja, Chhotu Ram was also required to read proofs of editorials of the English edition of the *Hindustan*. The work of editing was also given to him and it suited his genius because he had been good at English during his college days. The Raja was himself a literary figure and maintained a well equipped library which was thrown open to Chhotu Ram as well. The Raja had long discussions and discourses with Chhotu Ram and this brought the two together, so much so that they had their lunch together almost daily. Chhotu Ram was often reminded of the debt which he had to clear at the earliest available opportunity. He also confided to his friends that, instead of serving one person and keeping his loyalties confined to him throughout the whole of his life, it could be far more satisfying if he served his own community in his own hometown. He went to Bharatpur one of the well known Jat states about which he had heard and read especially of the chivalrous deeds of Maharaja Suraj Mal and his son, Jawahar Singh. He had left the job in the hope of exploring the greener pastures at Bharatpur (Rajasthan). But during those days Bharatpur was under a Council of Regency, appointed by the Governor General of India because Maharaja Ram Singh had been

deposed for his alleged enmity towards the British. Chhotu Ram felt disillusioned because even in their own state the Jats were no more than *personel non grata*. On reaching home, Chhotu Ram paid off the debt but there was no definite plan in mind about the future course of action.

After having failed in his search for a suitable job, Chhotu Ram went to Lahore and joined the law classes. Soon after plague broke out and engulfed not only the entire Punjab but also the adjoining Delhi. Chhotu Ram now had to seek shelter somewhere else but with no success.

After exhausting all possible avenues of employment Chhotu Ram decided to take to farming in his own village. It was indeed a miracle for him to receive a renewed call from his old employer on an enhanced salary of sixty rupees per month, besides free board and lodging. Chhotu Ram took up his old job and as before, devoted much of his time to writing for *Hindustan* and handling correspondence of the Raja. As before this time also the two had their lunch and dinner together. For months this schedule continued. However, Chhotu Ram felt annoyed when one day he went to the dinner room and noticed that the dinner was half through. He believed that the Raja was no more interested in keeping him in his job. So he went to his boss and begged leave of him, once and for all. The Raja was an extremely polished and cultured person and sought to dissuade Chhotu Ram from leaving the job but to no avail. Not willing to listen to the Raja, Chhotu Ram was given the option to return to his job after six months with the provision that he would receive full salary for the period he remained absent. However, Chhotu Ram did not relent and returned home once again.

After weighing all his prospects and possibilities, Chhotu Ram joined the law college at Agra. In order to meet expenses of board and lodging, he took up teaching at the local St. John's High School as a part time teacher. He passed his law examination in 1911 and started his practice at Agra itself. His work as a criminal lawyer created a flutter in and around Agra, with the result that he came to be ranked as one of the legal luminaries in adjoining districts of Mathura, Bharatpur, Aligarh, etc. He chose the local Jat Boarding House as his residence-cum-office, served as its superintendent and even collected funds for its repairs and renovations. The place came to be used for holding meetings of the Jat Sabha. In districts of U.P, Punjab and Delhi his clients grew enormously in numbers but he declined to take cases that were not based on reality of facts. He turned away many prospective litigants urging them not to waste time and money because their cases were based on fabrication. His three year's stay at Agra was extremely useful because he put himself on a firm legal footing through hardwork. He was extremely honest in his dealings with his clients and in some cases he rendered free services.

Influences on Early Life

Chhotu Ram had been brought up in an orthodox Hindu family. In almost all the peasant families, life was not influenced by narrow religious dogmas and doctrines, a fact as much true in Chhotu Ram's times as it is today. It was the Arya Samaj which dominated the Hindu thinking in most part of the present day Haryana. Chhotu Ram often participated in the congregations which were spearheaded

by dedicated saints and swamis. The workers often visited villages at night and preached the basic tenets of the new faith. Some districts in U.P, like Agra and Mathura, witnessed meteoric rise of this movement because they were deeply influenced by the teachings of Swami Dayanand's guru, Swami Vrijanand. Swami Dayanand extensively toured many states of Northern India and carried with him messages of the Samaj wherever he went. He did not believe so much in creating a cadre of disciples as in preaching the tenets himself in big gatherings. However, the Swami struck a discordant note in his speeches and writings when he denounced the age-old practice of idol-worship. He asserted that there was nothing to justify idolatry in the Vedas and other Hindu texts and scriptures. Quite the contrary, the followers of Sanatan Dharma preached that idol-worship was the practice taught by all Hindu shastras. They are often vehement in their condemnation of the Swami's thesis that the Vedas are against this practice. Nevertheless, such polemics are bound to exist so long as both camps stick to their own guns.

Chhotu Ram came into close contact with the Arya Samaj during his stay at Agra. The teachings of the Samaj deeply influenced him and he vowed to follow its principles in letter and spirit both in his personal and private life. He always wore a sacred thread around his neck and sat down on the floor for his prayers every morning and every evening. It may be pointed out, in passing, that when the examination forms were being sent from the St. Stephen's High School, Chhotu Ram wrote 'Vedic' in a column meant for recording one's religion. He agreed to write Hinduism in the specified column only after his teachers were able to convince him of the use of the right word to be filled in the column.

Chhotu Ram was very much upset when, as a minister in the Punjab cabinet, he learnt that the Jat officers had fallen on evil days. They were found to be using alcohol and were taking bribes from even the poor zamindars. He reminded them of the tenets of Arya Samaj and expressed the hope that they would follow and abide by them. He stood for revival of old spiritual values which alone, in his view, could take India to its pristine glory. He read the Gita daily and resolved to stick to karma-yoga, the real essence of a man's active life. Among the various values of life (purushartha) Chhotu Ram stressed the importance of all the four-viz., karma, artha, dharma and moksha, but his principal discipline was karma-yoga.

Chhotu Ram believed that every man is essentially spiritual and should not be blinded by false dogmas which necessarily make a man spirituality bankrupt, resulting in his bondage to the world of good and evil (sansara). Even a little that a man may do by way of goodness saves from a great fear, said Chhotu Ram quoting a verse from the *Gita*. No man, in Chhotu Ram's opinion, chooses evil as evil, but if he chooses evil he must be prepared to face the evil consequences as well. A good man will always do the good and avoid evil. This is the essence of the life of a true karma-yogi.

Rohtak in the Making of a Leader

Although Chhotu Ram had distinguished himself as a lawyer of repute in the Agra courts, he was often overtaken by a recurring sense of nostalgia for members of his family, old friends and relatives. He had spent over three years in Agra, and yearned for returning to his village, Garhi Sampla. Nothing seemed to him to be truer than the Sanskrit saying: ‘Mother and Motherland are dearer than even the heaven.’¹ On one fine morning he packed up his luggage and unexpectedly descended on his village in October 1912. After a short stay, he moved to Rohtak and started his practice in the local courts.

A Lawyer with a Difference

Within a short time he was a name to be reckoned with in the Rohtak courts, both criminal and civil. In course of time his colleagues began to feel the force of his legal genius. The word started doing the rounds in the nearby villages, with the result that the circle of his clientele began to grow wider with each passing day., He took special pleasure in conversing with his illiterate clients in the Haryanvi dialect,

¹ *Janani janma bhoomishch svargadapi gariyasi*

with the result that an easy exchange of views became possible between the two sides — namely, the client and his lawyer. This often brought about an intimate relationship which lasted even afterwards. Almost all his clientele came from the peasantry class, and the majority among these were Jats. Naturally, the non-Jat lawyers began to grow increasingly apprehensive of losing their Jat clients. It was the word in every village that Chhotu Ram meant victory in a legal battle. In most cases the cause of litigation was the dispute over possession of land. The litigation was a civil suit if the concerned parties were peace-loving, but it became a criminal case if the dispute took a violent form, resulting in bloodbath and even deaths. Chhotu Ram tried to bring the warring factions together for a compromise or a negotiated settlement, but the vested interests often foiled such sincere efforts. Often the concerned parties got stuck up with a rigid posture, and refused point blank to accept a rational, reasonable solution. Chhotu Ram was perhaps the solitary figure in courts who brought the litigants around him and even shared hukka puffs with them. Such a practice often led to the desired result.

Soon his colleagues took it amiss. First there were whispering campaigns and later open revolt. The Bar Association passed a resolution asking Chhotu Ram to mend his ways. Threats to have him disqualified as lawyer were held out and was asked to reply soon. But Chhotu Ram laughed at such a resolution and in return sent them a strong rebuff. His only defence was ‘that all those who came to him were poor peasants and it was the duty of all of us to help them as much as we could. He was firm in rejecting the resolution and reiterated that it was a human obligation to try to mitigate the sufferings of others.

A Model Code of Conduct

After long, protracted deliberation, Chhotu Ram came out with a carefully worded code of conduct which he thought ought to be unconditionally and absolutely binding on all lawyers alike. It was his conviction that the Code would enhance the prestige and status of the legal fraternity at large. This Code consisted of five principles which Chhotu Ram continued to follow consistently throughout the whole of his legal profession. These principles were as follows:

1. Never to resort to dubious means to extract more and more money, on one pretext or another from the clients.
2. Always to make full study of the case undertaken and to his best to take it to a successful conclusion.
3. Always to render free advice to those who come for consultation.
4. If some one comes to the lawyer for seeking his advice or help in order to cause harm to his rival, he should be dissuaded from doing so and prepare him, if possible, for reconciliation. In case he is adamant he should be sent home.
5. It is absolutely and categorically binding on a lawyer to treat his clients kindly, or if for some reason they happen to visit their lawyer at night or late hours, they should be provided with food and lodging.

In the Service of His Community

As we know, Chhotu Ram was a keen student of Sanskrit, both of his school and his college. He had made a deep study of Hindu texts and treatises which influenced him profoundly. He often quoted the Hitopadesh which taught:

In this mortal world who is not reborn and who does not die? But he alone is truly born whose birth leads to the elevation of his community (vansh). Chhotu Ram quoted the Hitopadesh on most occasions when he sought to impress upon his listeners the need to take up social service without hope of recompense.

As we know, Chhotu Ram had a continuous rapport and interaction with his Jat clients, and this provided a valuable source of information about the cause of their backwardness. He was well acquainted with the social organization, traditionally known as 'sarv khap panchayat' and was all praise for its good work in bringing all castes and communities on a common platform. But Chhotu Ram wanted an institution that could bring them together for launching a crusade against exploitation, literacy, backwardness, etc. Such an institution, in his view, could be one which was all-inclusive, free from regional distinctions and differences. So, the nomenclature that was approved by some enlightened Jats was All India Jat Mahasabha, which was got registered in 1907. As per its Constitution, every district head-quarter was supposed to have a branch of the organization, governed by an executive committee, charged with a task of implementing its aims and objectives. It was also expected that both the central and the provincial committees would chalk out policies and programmes that were instrumental in promoting emotional

integration among the Jats spread over different parts of the country. Chhotu Ram drummed up sufficient support in almost all the provinces dominated by the Jags, and used his personal influences to see that it served the purpose for which it was launched. During a memorable session held on 9th April 1944 at Lyall Pur (in united Punjab) the Mahasabha conferred on Chhotu Ram its highest honour — that of Rahbar-i-Azam, the Supreme Leader in opposition to the similar move to name Jinnah the Quid-i-Azam by the Muslim League.

Before proceeding further we shall remind our reader that Chhotu Ram had to seek admission in the St. Stephen's High School because even Rohtak, being a district headquarter had no such school .he was now determined to make good This deficiency. So he invited some well meaning persons of his community who helped him in starting the Jat High School in 1913. With Chhotu Ram as the secretary of the Jat Education Society, the gates of the school were thrown open to students of all castes and communities, but the priority was to be given to students of the Jat community. The school had a band of dedicated teachers, with the result that it made a name in the entire district. It is on record that almost all Jat officers civilian or military, are, or have been, the students of this school. With a spacious campus, a number of other institutions, as, for instance, Chhotu Ram College of Engineering, Jat Heroes Memorial College, Rani Kishori College for Girls, etc have come up subsequently.

While Chhotu Ram was busy in doing something for the good of his community, First World War (1914-18) broke out, and in this he saw an opportunity to get the youthful Jat boys enlisted in the army. The Jats have been traditionally

considered as coming from a martial race, who would like to sacrifice their lives rather than surrender to the enemy. That is why the British defence department was all praise for them.

Chhotu Ram saw in this a chance for the sturdy Jat boys to go to distant lands, see for themselves how people there were trying to modernize themselves, and bring with them new ideas in the light of which they could learn to improve their condition and move towards their economic, social and educational advancement. Accordingly, Chhotu Ram went to meet people in villages and inspired the Jat Youth to get themselves enlisted in the army. Impressed by such efforts the Punjab Government issued orders that even during the war days the agriculturist of Ambala Division be given priority in filling government vacancies. It may be noted, in passing that almost all nationalists, including Gandhiji and others, supported the British war efforts. In response to a question as to what India will get in return, Chhotu Ram stated in unequivocal terms: "India will be given full freedom. In recognition of his help and support to the British war preparations Chhotu Ram was honoured with the life of Rao Sahib. And when later the Deputy Commissioner congratulated Chhotu Ram on receiving the British title, the letter's comment was: "I helped in recruitment not for the sake of a little but because I thought I would, in this way, ensure that the Indian people would become strong and not succumb to another foreign power. The Punjab Government allotted one hundred acres of land as a reward for his efforts from the newly developed forest lands. Before agreeing to such a reward, Chhotu Ram saw to it that at

least three thousand acres of land was allotted to the lower strata of the rural society (kamins). After independence various Congress governments in states took a clue from this innovative idea and started distributing surplus village panchayat lands to the landless people of the Rarijan community. This was a wonderful idea to bring social handicapped people on par with others of the higher strata.

Chhotu Ram's constant interaction with the peasants and others often induced him to think how he could reach up to them and prepare them for a new mode of living. Naturally, he was led to the conception of a powerful medium of mass communication, which he called *Jat Gazette*. He was a prolific writer and he thought he could transform the backward peasant community into a progressive lot only when it was in touch with this news bulletin. The writing work he did at Kalakankar for the English *Hindustan* was asset to him now. And by 'Jat' he in fact meant the entire peasant community, so that the *Jat Gazette* could be service to all in their vocation. The *Jat Gazette* was an Urdu weekly paper and contained mostly Chhotu Ram's views and comments. But it was not at all possible for him to continue with such a paper for long. He devoted most of his time to social work, with the result that his earnings were not even sufficient for properly maintaining his family. A close friend of his, Kanhaiya Lal, set the ball rolling by offering a handsome donation of fifteen hundred rupees. Many others jumped into the fray, one vying with another. Soon Chhotu Ram collected handsome donations and the *Jat Gazette* took off with a bang. Chhotu Ram collected handsome donations and the *Jat Gazette* took off with a bang. Chhotu Ram served as its editor in the initial stage.

If the Whiteman were after the *Jat Gazette*, the latter was after the former, and the two did not miss even a minor chance. Once the Deputy Commissioner of Gurgaon took liberty in indulging in the wanton pleasure of killing peacocks, and, as expected, the matter was soon reported by the *Jat Gazette*. As we know, such an incident is most repulsive to the Hindu Sentiment. As soon as the news spread in the area, there were strong protests. Chhotu Ram came out with an anguished mind and demanded an immediate, unconditional apology from the British bureaucrat. Unmindful of consequences, the bureaucrat complained to the Commissioner of Ambala Division and the Governor that Chhotu Ram was behind the uprising and that the license of the *Jat Gazette* be cancelled forthwith. As is natural in such cases, some well-wishes of the British Officer sought to pressurize Chhotu Ram into offering an unconditional apology, but Chhotu Ram was not the man to be so easily swept off his feet. He continued to stick to his guns to the last moment. With no other alternative in sight, the Deputy Commissioner had to eat the humble pie. He to the rationalization that he was not aware that killing a peacock was a sin.

In the Role of a Congressman

For Chhotu Ram, Arya Samaj was both a social philosophy and a personal faith. Gradually, the movement came to be endeared by most Hindus in the Punjab because of its simple principles fit enough to be easily intelligible to the common man. The result was that those Hindu was jumped into the 1923 provincial election carried this tag intact. Certainly, those who were Arya Samajists voted for those who claimed to be the adherents of this movement. Chhotu

Ram joined the Congress in 1916. Now, he combined in himself three different roles: He was a leader of the Jats, an Arya Samajist and a Congressman. The trouble arose when an Arya Samajist favoured an other Arya Samajist, a Jat favoured another Jat. All this was good, but it did not take Chhotu Ram far enough. The need was now felt to transcend all limitations arising out of narrow considerations. A universal standpoint was needed and this is how a sound political philosophy could be evolved so as to serve the interests of all, irrespective of considerations of caste, colour or creed. He was well aware of what it all could mean. He himself “had been affairly bigoted Arya Samajist” and all this was three to blur his political vision. To quote him here, “I perceived almost instinctively that, in order to rescue the Punjab as a whole from the domination of agricultural tribes irrespective of religion. A few attempts made earlier to secure the cooperation of all agricultural tribes, Hindu and Muslim, had unfortunately proved ineffective. On the other hand, successful counter-attempts had been made to isolate the Jats with the result that the Jats found hand turned against themselves”. This was one reason why Chhotu Ram thought it wise to keep away politically from the Hindu Mahasabha. The conclusion he now arrived at was clear: that if there was anything that could unite all peasants, it was the economic factor, and nothing but that.

Before the World War came to a close in 1918, the British had made tall promises of granting provincial-autonomy and other rights to the Indians. The Indian soldiers had fought with bravery, many of whom had been killed in operations. Almost all political parties, with the solitary exception of the Muslim League, had unconditionally

supported the British war efforts, but the British Government was not prepared to redeem its pledge: Power remained in its own hands, and soon terror was let loose on those who threatened to resort to direct action. There was, therefore, wide, spread resentment and disillusionment. With no alternative before the Indian leaders, Gandhiji issued a complete hartal call to the nation on 1st April 1919.

The British administration decided to meet the situation by resorting to repressive measures. The First World War had ended, but its aftermath was most troublesome. People were complaining of acute shortages of essential commodities, higher prices, unemployment, and atrocities of the British rule. It was natural, therefore, that the British Government take recourse to sweeping powers, the enactment of Rowlatt Act being one of them. Mahatma Gandhi and also his followers resented and reacted sharply. The arrest of the Mahatma on April 10 fanned the political fire, which broke out in the form of passive resistance or satyagraha. Consequently, the entire country was engulfed in anti-British demonstrations and strikes, which incidentally turned violent in some provinces.

The Punjab witnessed the same phenomenon. On 1st April a big convention was arranged at the Gokaran tank in Rohtak city. Chhotu Ram attended the convention as president of the District Congress, who along with others, launched a blistering attack on the British administration for its obscurantism, atrocities, false promises and brazen violation of fundamental rights, Chhotu Ram and his other companions were tried for alleged sedition, but were acquitted by the District Sessions Judge soon after the arrest. Another convention was called at Rohtak for the same purpose. After it ended,

Lal Chand, a close associate of Chhotu Ram, handed over a prepared statement to the latter and wanted him to sign it to avoid further trouble from the British Government. It was in a sense an apology which Chhotu Ram rejected outright. Naturally, the British bureaucracy felt mortally hit and threatened to launch legal proceedings against him on various fabricated charges.

Meanwhile, RC. Bolster had taken over as the new Deputy Commissioner of Rohtak, and Chhotu Ram's detractors seized the opportunity to poison the Whiteman's ears by presenting false pictures of his political activity. They made it a point to meet the new bureaucrat almost daily in new combinations. On learning of the conspiracy against him, Chhotu Ram wrote to Bolster to clarify his position, but the latter did not take the contents of the letter seriously. Determined to have his whim carried to its conclusion, he recommended deportation of Chhotu Ram, as the sole panacea for all political ills in the district. Happily enough, the British superintendent of police firmly refused to toe his line of action. The obstinate bureaucrat referred the matter to the Commissioner of Ambala Division, but here too there was nothing but utter disappointment for Bolster. The Police officer's assessment was accepted as correct, and Chhotu Ram came off with flying colours. Many friends of Chhotu Ram met the Governor and requested him to tell Bolster to learn to behave. The matter did not end here, however. The arrogant British bureaucrat recommended cancellation of grant of one hundred acres of land which had been given to him for his services in the war efforts and collection of war funds. Unable to cause any harm to his political status, the revengeful officer sent feelers to his

adversary for a compromise, but to no avail Chhotu Ram remained firm and unmoved, and this added to his political strength.

The Commissioner of Ambala Division, H.A. Casson was stunned at hearing of Chhotu Ram's active help and participation in the Rowlatt Act uprising. He accused Chhotu Ram of treachery and wrote a strongly worded letter to Lal Chand, Chhotu Ram's close associate. "Chhotu Ram" the letter read, "Is entitled to any opinion he likes on the Rowlatt Bill. He can deliberately break the law at his own risk, and can excite others to do so, but any man who does this is bound at least to say he will not accept gifts from Government with one hand while endeavouring to strike Government with the other" Only a few days before this letter, Chhotu Ram had gone to Montgomery to receive the gift of one hundred acres of land. He took it all as an act of personal vendetta and publicly announced his decision to return the land as well as the title of Rao Sahib conferred on him during the war days. But the British policymakers advised the concerned Government not to go ahead; since he could still be of service to the province in ensuring cooperation of peasantry which provided manpower for the British army. A better climate had come to prevail after Bolster's exit in 1920.

There was another institution in Rohtak in whose activities and objectives Chhotu Ram was much interested. The local district board was on his watch list. Elections, whenever held were often rigged and local vested interests, like zaildars safedposhs patwaris, kept them under their suzerainty. Among them was Rai Sahib Chaudhary, Nihal Singh Zaildar, who was often found to be dancing to the

British tunes. He was often seen bowing before the Deputy Commissioner whom he addressed as his 'mai bap' just for a few loaves and fishes. During an election Chhotu Ram put up Devi Singh as his candidate. The contest took an interesting turn with Mahant Puran Nath supporting the candidature of Nihal Singh. Devi Singh's success enhanced Chhotu Ram's reputation and he was now looked upon as the undisputed leader of the rural masses of Rohtak. But soon after, Nihal Singh was murdered in a family feud. Mahant Puran Nath took it to be a golden opportunity to settle old scores with Chhotu Ram. An FIR was ordered to be lodged by the police against Chhotu Ram and his legal partner, Lal Chand. The serious grievances against both especially against Chhotu Ram who in his Jat Gazette had written as many as seventeen columns under the caption 'Thagi ke bazaar ki sair', wherein both these bureaucrats had been specially targeted. Though arrangements had been made in advance backtracked for fear of reprisals. When all this was getting a little loud and vehement, a deputation of influential people of the district waited on the Commissioner of Ambala Division and lodged a strong protest against the biased and partial attitude of two British Officers. The Commissioner assured the deputationists that he would personally inquire into the matter. The Commissioner visited Rohtak and conducted the inquiry himself. Jug Lal Zaildar was most vocal amongst those who deposed before the Commissioner and pleaded the case of Chhotu Ram and Lal Chand before a big gathering of people. Addressing the Commissioner in his own dialect, the Zaildar held the British Officers responsible for defaming the government by implicating eminent people like Chhotu Ram and Lal Chand in false cases. He warned the Commissioner against the British administration which would

add to the already diminishing reputation of the British Raj. The Commissioner was deeply impressed by all that had been told, and amidst thunderous applause declared both Chhotu Ram and Lal Chand as the respectable figures of the Commissioner added, there was nothing against such persons to justify any further inquiry. With this announcement there was scenes of jubilation, and the supporters of both raised slogans in their favour. They were profusely garlanded, and truth had after all been victorious. Chhotu Ram's political stature had now gone very high and his name had crossed the frontiers of the district. All this was believed to be helpful in his launching a new political party which unfortunately he could not. Throughout all his life he fought for the rights of others and never confessed defeat before injustice.

Disillusionment with the Congress

It was in September 1920 that a big convention of Congressmen was organized at Calcutta. A resolution was adopted and passed on this occasion under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Among other things, the resolution called upon all Indians to return to the British Government all titles, honours conferred on them, to resign from their jobs, to refuse payment of all kinds of taxation, to boycott all schools and colleges, to refrain from using foreign goods, and even stop getting enlisted in the army, Mahatma Gandhi visited Rohtak on 8th October, 1920 with a view to infusing life and light into the Non-cooperation Movement.

Another convention was held at Bhiwani after a fortnight, and Chhotu Ram participated with his supports, but opposed tooth and nail that part of the resolution which

called upon the peasants not to pay land revenue could be confiscated on Non-payments of even a part of the total land revenue liability. In case of default, the continued, the landholdings auctioned by the government could well be purchased by the affluent moneylenders as well as those officials who had become rich by resorting to corrupt practices. The peasant would thus be deprived of his land, which in most cases was the sole source of his family's sustenance. Chhotu Ram continued to defy the resolution with all the logic at his' command, and those peasants — legions of them — who understood him solidly stood behind him. The Jat Gazette found its way in every peasant's hearth and home. In his paper he said: 'We are being asked not pay land revenue, but all this will lead to the confiscation of our lands. We must took at the Non—cooperation Movement from a perspective that is conducive for the welfare of our community.'

Even after prolonged deliberations and discussions Chhotu Ram could not convince himself how Gandhiji's Non-coopeation call could be helpful as a device for attaining freedom from the foreign yoke. He once remarked: 'I worked with the Congress up to 1920, or till the time Non-cooperation received the official sanction of the Congress, at a special session at Calcutta. Mahatma Gandhi insisted that, in order to be successful in its purpose, non-cooperation was to be on a mass scale and was to remain from beginning to end non-violent not only in action, but also in word and thought. Defiance of law and non-payment of taxes were to be the main planks of the movement. I never believed, and never can believe, that any campaign of Non-cooperation on a really wide scale could remain peaceful or non-violent even in

actions, for Non-violence in word or thought in possible only among angels, and we all know that the general body of men are anything but angles. Defiance of law and Non-payment of taxes are, to my mind, or a par with armed revolt, and lay the axe at the root of those fundamental principles on which the structure of human society rests. They must inevitably result in violence, bloodshed, chaos and confusion. The whole fundamental basis of the movement on which hopes of success depended being thus, in my humble opinion, essentially unsound and opposed to all human experience, I came to the conclusion that Non-cooperation was a futile creed—and resigned from the Congress.’ It was on 8th November, 1920.

The Quest for a Foothold in Politics

The Morley-Minto recommendations of 1909 had stressed the need for ‘increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration, and the general development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as integral part of the British Empire.’

In pursuance of such an objective, the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 announced, soon after the end of the First World War in 1918 a schedule for holding elections to the legislative councils in the provinces in accordance with rules and regulations as laid down by the Halifax Committee. The Reforms stipulated that the electorates of the rural and urban population shall be separate, and that the number of seats allotted shall be in proportion to the population. It was also required that “for seats allotted to the rural population the candidates should belong to the statutory agricultural tribes of the province. It was also mandatory for candidates from the rural as also from the urban constituencies that they should have resided in the constituencies of their choice for a certain period of time.

The first Punjab Council was to consist of twenty-three official and non-official members to be nominated by the Governor. Besides, there were to be seventy-one elected members, among whom thirty-five were to be Muslims, fifteen Sikhs, and twenty-one Hindus. While, on the one hand there were rumours that, in the wake of the Non-cooperation Movement, the forthcoming election could be boycotted by the patriotic elements, there were on the other some political heavyweights who threatened to launch a province-wide agitation against what in their view was an artificial division of the society into two segments -viz. rural and urban. Fazl-i-Hussain, who was the leader of the Rural Block in the Council from 1916 onwards, took up cudgel against such provisions of the of the Halifax Committee. His objection was that 'the urban and the rural people should not be segregated and placed in watertight compartments'¹. It was his considered view, however, 'that in the ultimate analysis this distinction is very hard to maintain continuously.'²

Chhotu Ram was no less vocal in condemning the Committee's view. He wrote in the Tribune: "The imposition of any inter-district restrictions on the score of residence will seriously imperil the chances of any real growth of political life in the countryside. Rural areas cannot boast of any thoroughly competent candidates and such a crude application of the principle of the 'residential qualification', as is provided by the Halifax Committee, will result in a political disaster of the first magnitude. It is difficult to view with equanimity the prospects of a Council swarming with mere dummies. And if the recommendations of the Halifax

¹ F.H., p.152

² *Ibid.*

Committee are accepted this will be exactly the result. Inefficiency, incompetence, incapacity and ignorance will be the only fruits borne by the Halifax Committee's recommendations.³

The objections raised by Chhotu Ram and Fazi-i-Hussain, independently of each other, against these recommendations were not without a logic of their own. The result was as expected. These were withdrawn by the Punjab Government soon before the election to the second Council. As such those candidates who wished to contest the 1923 Council election found, for themselves a wide variety of choice of constituencies from which they wanted to stand without any restriction.

Election to the First Reformed Council

The notification of election -schedule brought in its trail a strong wave of wild exuberance among the people of the province, Universal enfranchisement was now not a mere dogma or an empty slogan in the air but a tangible reality on the ground, a inextricable ingredient of human freedom and dignity. With no organized political party around Chhotu Ram had drawn his own political roadmap. Election was to be fought on individual basis. He opted for the Jhajjar-Sonepat constituency in which he was a familiar name.⁴ Just then Lal Chand, his senior partner in legal practice, was hoping to receive an offer to appointment as District Sessions Judge, but Chhotu Ram was somehow interested in bringing him

³ *Tribune* (Labore Ed.), May 1, 1920

⁴ Chhotu Ram's father-in-law who belonged to Kheri Jat Village which fell within the Jhajjar-Sonepat constituency, had assured his son-in-law of success in case he formed his own party.

into politics. Lal Chand had been assured by his partner that he was sure to win and could also be inducted into the cabinet as a minister of the Council from the rural constituency of Ambala Division.

With electioneering at its peak in and around Rohtak Lajpat Rai, a senior Congress leader, unexpectedly dropped into the Jat Heartland. Although his local supporters gave out that he had come to organise, coordinate and supervise the election work in Haryana, his real motive was to persuade Chhotu Ram to return to the Congress organization which he had left a little time before. But Chhotu Ram declined the offer and indicated his intention to contest the election as an independent candidate. Instead, he suggested that Lal Chand be formally inducted into the Congress fold and be declared as an official Congress candidate from the Rohtak-Gohana constituency. Lajpat Rai sharply reacted against the proposal and stated that Lal Chand was more a friend of the British than that of the Congress. To substantiate his charge, Lajpat Rai said that Lal Chand had associated himself some time back with the reception accorded to Michael O'Dwyer, the mastermind behind the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre. The real purpose of Lajpat Rai's Rohtak itinerary came into the open when he invited Chhotu Ram to contest the forthcoming election against Lal Chand himself and offer proof of his opposition to the British Raj. Ram was quick to retort that the proposal was preposterous. He was emphatic in his assertion that his colleague's entry into the Congress was being opposed because he happened to be a Jat. Why should Lal Chand alone, he countered, be singled out a villain of the piece in the Michael O'Dwyer reception case when certain veteran Hindu leader, like Raja Narendra Nath, Bakshi

Tek Chand, Gokal Chand Narang, Harksihen Lal Gauba had actively worked and participated in the reception? Chhotu Ram did not mince words and told Lajpat Rai in unequivocal terms that 'the day there arose possibilities of Lal Chand's becoming a minister, he will be opposed for the same reason'. Strange as it may sound, what Chhotu Ram had said in a light vein turned out to be true.

With chances of a rapprochement having come to a naught, battlelines were drawn along certain guidelines. To discharge his obligations, Chhotu Ram undertook a hectic tour of those areas where Lal Chand's position was weak. As is usual during election days, complaints crop up endlessly. Lal Chand could not be an exception. He had to face two complaints: first, that he did nothing to thwart the operation of the 'Sedition Meetings Act' which the Arya Samajists said was primarily directed against them, and; second, that he had colluded with the unpatriotic elements who had associated themselves with the O'Dwyer reception. Chhotu Ram met prominent Arya Samaj leaders, like Zaildar Jug Lal, Peeru Singh, and others, who assured all possible help and support for Lal Chand. As good luck would have it, Lal Chand's rival candidate's nomination papers were found not in order and Lal Chand was declared elected unopposed.

Chhotu Ram was left with only a few days for canvassing, and to his dismay he had to face stiff opposition from two hostile quarters: the moneylenders on the one hand, and the bureaucrats on the other. If the former were his enemies because of his anti-moneylender stance, the latter felt annoyed because of his launching a tirade against them in the Jat Gazette. Both raised funds by public subscription and handed this money to his adversary, Sarup Singh, a prominent person,

with connections. The village elders went to persuade him to retire from the electoral battle, but he got away with a very tricky reply: “that he is willing to do so but only after the Gulia Khap issues an ‘order’ (Hukumnama) to that effect. As was planned, just a day before the polling date Sarup Singh’s supporters sent camel drivers to various villages of the Khap Brotherhood just to propagate the canard that Sarup Singh had been unanimously adopted as the consensus candidate in whose favour votes were to be cast, and this was done by the gullible villagers most faithfully. Chhotu Ram lost by a razor-thin margin of twenty two votes.

Chhotu Ram’s defeat, viewed from a long-range perspective, was a blessing in disguise. The three-years respite he enjoyed, it is held, was devoted to assessing the magnitude of Punjab indebtedness, the impact of the Punjab Land Alienation Act, the need for legislative measures to prevent large -scale alienations and transfers of lands into the hands of crafty moneylenders, the provision of rural credit at reasonable rates, drawing blue prints for the proposed Bhakra Dum, etc. Chhotu Ram was well ware that the problems faced by the peasants were multi-pronged. If, on the one hand, there were moneylenders to suck their blood, there were, one the other, corrupt officials no less cruel and exacting. His heart bled when he heard grievances. The petty police and revenue officials, who were well within the greased, by cash or kind or even both. The weary peasants asked Chhotu Ram if there was a way to bring those notorious elements on the part of duty. “Yes”, was the reply, “only by giving them a “shoe-beating” If at all there was a way out, this was the way only to teach a lesson to such lethargic, corrupt officials. He said that people went to jails when they quarrelled

or fought amongst themselves, but, he added, there was nothing wrong if one went to jail by beating a corrupt official. This is how, in his view, they could be taught to respect human dignity.

Misfortunes Overtake Lal Chand

Soon after his entry into the first Reformed Council, constituted in early 1921, Lal Chand had proposed that ‘the electorate of rural and urban population in the Punjab should be separate, and that the number of seats allotted should be in proportion to the population.’ Fazl-i-Hussain was appointed as the Education Minister by Governor Edward Madagan, for he recognized the Unionist Party as the majority party in the Council.⁵ But Lal Chand’s view of separate electorates for the rural and urban population did not suit him in appointing a minister. He was already in favour of having Harksihan Lal Gauba selected as a minister. Accordingly, on his recommendation Harkishan Lal was appointed as Minister of Agriculture. None of them was however, from the rural constituency. Chhotu Ram reacted sharply. In his Urdu Weekly he wrote: “Both of them are connected with the urban population and were elected by special constituencies. The New Council contains a large number of members elected by rural constituencies, and unless the present ministers are appointed by them, they will be unable to retain their posts even with the help of official and nominated members. The nomination of both from among the representatives of the urban population is an insult to the men returned by rural constituencies”.

⁵ FH., p.156

Still, there was much worse in store for Lal Chand. He had hardly settled down to his new job when his political opponent, Goverdhan Das, filed an election petition against him. He was found guilty of having committed serious irregularities in the eyes of law and, consequently, was declared disqualified. The political career of both Chhotu Ram and Lal Chand had virtually come to a naught, at least for the time being.

But Lal Chand found an escape route from this tragedy. From very early days he had been friendly towards the British and had established his contacts with Governor Malcolm Hailey. At one stage of his political life he had been sounded for a District Sessions Judge's post. With Chhotu Ram at his beck and call, now he was successful in getting a seat in the Council of States.

Chhotu Ram was much in demand at the district level. The British administrators were all familiar with the work he had done during the First World War - especially, in mobilizing the Jat youth for recruitment to the Indian Army, collecting war funds, and supervising the preparation of publicity material. Now that he was available at the local level, he was invited to almost every meeting convened to work out plans for the welfare of the district. He was assigned to many important organizations. At one time he was elected as the vice-president of the local District Board, at another as the Director of the Cooperative Bank at the district level as well as subsidiary branches. The peasants were happy now. They were able to turn their back upon the moneylenders and had no fear of their dwellings, hands, cattle, etc., being taken away by them. To be sure, Chhotu Ram was now on his way to political rehabilitation.

Plan For Floating a Political Party

Chhotu Ram's defeat in the first election to the Council was a big jolt both to himself and his peasant fraternity. So, he began to evolve his strategy much in advance. It was his firm conviction that a well organized and disciplined party was the first prerequisite for entering the Council. He had been badly hurt by the way Lal Chand had been deprived of his right to ministership. It was well recognized that the Hindi-speaking areas of the Ambala counterparts. That could have been the main reason why Lal Chand's right was so lightly brushed aside.

Chhotu Ram was now ready to do everything to put the entire Amabala Division on the political map of the Punjab. Therefore, he took in his hands the onerous task of broadening the political base to cover up all the districts of the Ambala Division: viz., Ambala, Kamal, Rohtak, Hisar, Gurgaon Bhiwani and Mahendegarh. He knew that the urban areas would not like to be associated with what aimed at being a rural organization. Accordingly, he identified four distinct classes of agriculturists —viz., Ahir, Jat, Gujjar and Rajput (AlGAR). Soon the Mahasabhaite Hindus and the Congressmen came out into the open and charged Chhotu Ram, with attempting to communalize the entire atmosphere. Chhotu Ram wrote many impressive editorials in the Jat Gazette to educate the masses but with no response. He sought to explain to the readers that the proposed party was neither casteist nor religious in any intelligible sense of term, but that it had the economic interests of the masses as its chief motto and motive.

While Chhotu Ram was midway in his search, the election schedule for the 1923 Council was announced. Now, he deemed it fit to contest the forthcoming election on the old pattern. The plan of launching a political outfit was shelved for the time being.

Election to the Second Reformed Council

The Mont-Ford Reforms had provided for election to the Council after every three years. Accordingly, the next election was announced in 1923. The Chhotu Ram-Lal Chand combine sprang into the electoral fray once again. Chhotu Ram opted for his old Jhajjar-Sonepat constituency, one course, with better preparedness. This time he was opposed by Randhir Singh of Badli Gulian and Phool Kumar of Machhrauli Village. The latter pinned his hope of taking a lead over the other two on the fact that both rivals happened to be Jats whose votes would be divided among themselves. This time Chhotu Ram was a name to reckon with and he was, therefore, easily able to trounce both the adversaries by a comfortable margin of 1902 votes. This stunning victory signalled a prelude to the glorious future of peasantry. Assuredly, history in the Punjab was destined to change not only its theme but its course as well.

Meanwhile, Chhotu Ram had persuaded Lal Chand to resign his Council of States seat and contest the election from his old Rohtak-Gohana constituency. The latter had been well assured of his victory this time too, plus a possible ministerial post. This time his political rival was Matu Ram

of Sanghi village, a Congress nominee and highly respected in his area. But Lal Chand emerged victorious once again, defeating his adversary by a comfortable margin in over seven hundred votes.

Thus, both Chhotu Ram and Lal Chand entered the Council with renewed vigour and better coordination. In fact, the future not only of peasantry but of the entire Ambala Division hinged on how they fulfilled their election promises.

The Unionist Party

A Meeting of Two Minds

If there was anything remarkable about the second Reformed Council, constituted in 1923, it was the conspicuous presence therein of two extraordinarily mature and seasoned politicians — Chhotu Ram and Fazl -i-Hussain. While the former was a new entrant, the latter had enjoyed the covered position as Education Minister in the first Council which had come into existence after the 1920 election.

Fazl-i-Hussain (1877-1936) had received his higher education in England. After qualifying himself for the Bar - at -Law degree he returned to India and practiced as a lawyer at Sialkot. Well known for his legal qualification, he could easily make his way to the Legislative Council from the Lahore University seat in 1916. Soon after he became ambitious of soaring still higher into the realm of politics. He founded the Rural Party which aimed at improving the social, economic and educational conditions of his Muslim community. Fazl-i-Hussain was pained at the poor peasantry's exploitation by the Hindu moneylenders, absence of rural dispensaries, schools and colleges, cooperative societies, etc. He took up the cause of his community's poor representation

on local bodies and in public services, Soon he came to be described as the leader of the Muslims. This could well be the reasons why he was dubbed as ‘communalist in contrast to Chhotu Ram who’” stood for a rural populism which unified agriculturists around hostility to the moneylender other.”¹

The Unionist Party loudly proclaimed that it was based neither on the artificial distinction of ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ nor on the religious faith of the Hindu Muslims, Sikhs, etc. To safeguard the interests of the agriculturists it had stoutly defended ‘the decades old Punjab Alienation of Land Act which was to the Unionists what the Vedas were to the Hindus and the Holy Quran was to the Musalmans.’² The abolition of the ‘residential qualification’ went a long way in ensuring social cohesion, with the result that the different castes and communities soon began to respond to the Unionist urges and aspirations.

We shall here recall that there was a time when Fazl-i-Hussain was the president of the Provincial Congress Committee and Chhotu Ram that of the Rohtak District Congress Committee. Nevertheless both the leaders bore the imprint of Congress ideology and proudly claimed that ‘once a Congressman always a Congressman’³. If there was a slogan which the Unionist Party could fittingly raise it was ‘Economic Interests of all’. It was fully recognized by the rank and file of the Party that peace, prosperity and progress could be ensured only when the three strands of the political

¹ KT. p.-38

² Gilmartin, D. *Empire and Islam, Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*, p-118

³ KT., p-170

rope could be so interwoven that the one was hardly distinguishable from the other two. It was no easy task to usher in an era of good governance in a province, like the Punjab, which was vulnerable to the communal onslaughts of the Muslim League Party. As we know, the Party provided good governance to the province, and that was perhaps the reasons why the fissiparous tendencies of a major segment of the society were successfully kept under control during the rule lasting over two decades. All the prominent leaders of the Party — Fazl-i-Hussain, Chhotu Ram, Sikander Hyat Khan, and Khizar Hyat Khan — were absolutely free from communal germs, dedicated to the sole aim of making the province a truly welfare society. And when the communal elements had succeeded in wresting power from it in 1946 there was no appeal for sanity from any where. Punjab had become a victim of an all-pervasive gloom and doom.

Aims and Objectives

By any reckoning, the aims and objectives were so carefully and thoughtfully framed that any civilized society could well be proud of. The right thinking people acclaimed these as sure indications of a welfare state, and that gave the Unionists the requisite strength to proceed further on their mission. These aims and objectives were:

- I. To attain, as early as could be possible, by constitutional means Dominion Status within the British Commonwealth of Nations.
- II. To demonstrate that, given suitable opportunities and reasonable facilities, Indians are by nature

capable of shouldering the responsibilities of self-rule.

- III. To show that the constructive efforts, if directed in a sprit of good will and earnestness to working of reforms, can produce better results for the Indian community than mere destructive criticism or malicious opposition.
- IV. To provide equal opportunities as well as facilities for advancement to all, and to so arrange things that all benefits for which the Government has worked with zeal and reach the poor and backward classes and areas.
- V. To ensure a fair and just distribution of the burden of provincial taxes between the agricultural and the other non-agricultural classes.
- VI. To ensure a just and fair representation of all communities and classes in the public services of the State.
- VII. To so arrange things that there is no exploitation of the economically backward classes at the hands of the economically advanced classes.
- VIII. To promote indigenous industries and also encourage the use of indigenous goods, so that there are chances of employment for the people of the country.
- IX. To banish the menace of illiteracy once and for all.
- X. To secure decentralization of power, systematically and gradually.

- XI. To promote the growth of institutions concerned with Governancc of local bodies.
- XII. To bring down drastically all acts of litigation.
- XIII. To promote measures that tend to promote economy.
- XIV. To check the menace of corruption and bribery at all levels of national life.
- XV. To preserve intact the Land Alienation Act as a means of protecting the interest of the backward classes especially in rural area.

To sum up: The chief aim of the Unionist Party was defined as the uplift of the backward classes and backward area, wherever they existed, no matter they existed among the Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs, among agriculturists in rural tracts or urban tracts.

“However, economic regeneration is only one of the targets to be achieved. It is the integrated development of all that makes for a truly welfare state. Thus looked at, the ultimate aim of the party is to raise, by means of special attention and efforts, to a reasonable welfare, intellectual advance, political consciousness and physical comforts for all those classes and areas. respective of caste. creed and situation. Which, through neglect of centuries. have been left behind in the race for life and have sunk, or been allowed to sink, to a level of ignorance, property and helplessness which rendered their economic and political exploitation, by advanced classes. an easy task and a phenomenon of daily occurrence.”

Both the exponents of this creed, Chhotu Ram and Fazi-i-Hussain, firmly believed that religion is purely a personal matter or anyone who believes and practices it. The Unionist Party, it was asserted, was a party of the exploited and the lowly and those who subscribed to such a philosophy could join it. In a public lecture, Chhotu Ram said, "The door of admission to the party is open to all those who subscribe to those views and policy of the party, and none who has a genuine feeling for the backward classes, and a true sympathy with those whom the changes of life have subjected to the economic exploitation and political domination of more favoured classes, need fight shy of the National Unionist Party." the Party held out promise of brining about all-round development of the province in all spheres of public life, such as health, education, employment social amity, economic regeneration etc.

Not unsurprisingly, the party soon after its inception began to make wonderful strides. Even the British bureaucrats began to eye it with increasing suspicious. So also the Congress had started with forecasts of its disintegration, based purely on envy. On its own the new Party could feel legitimately proud of its economic polices and programmes, and show to others how secularism could work when there was no economic inequalities and its necessary adjunct, namely exploitation. It was no in a position to cross swords with other parties in the field.

In Defence of the Party

With the broad outlines of the Party having been thus set forth, both Chhotu Ram and Fazl-i-Hussain loudly claimed

that the Unionist Party was the real Congress in the Punjab. The secular credentials of the Party attracted intellectuals, like Dr. Mohammad Iqbal with whose poetry Chhotu Ram used to motivate the commoners and exerted considerable influence in giving it a liberal and humane face. The Mahasabhaite Hindus felt uneasy when they heard the Unionist speak of secularism as the best panacea for all communal rivalries, tensions and squabbles which had the potency of triggering violent clashes.

We have here a case in point. Sir Ganga Ram is on record having had an interview with Governor Malcolm Hailey to remind him that since the practice in the past had been to fill up the cabinet vacancies on the basis of population, the urban Hindus, who, according to him, had never been found wanting in extending support and help to the British Raj in prevalent situation would never get a cabinet berth. It was on this plea that he wanted an urban Hindu, not a rural Hindu, to get preference or priority in getting inducted into the Cabinet. Was it not rank communalism? By the same token, Lajpat Rai, a prominent Congress functionary, dubbed the Unionist party as dominated by feudal lords and communal ideologues. In Chhotu Ram's view, all such allegations and insinuations were born of biased minds. It was his considered opinion that the Punjab Hindus were in a dilemma, and so long as they were entangled in it they could never see the truth. If, Chhotu Ram pointed out, they were nationalists, as they claimed they were they should unhesitatingly associate themselves with Muslims and Sikhs and forge a unity to fight the British Raj. And, if they cannot do so, they must remain satisfied with their narrow communal creed. Strangely enough this was that they said they could not.

It was Chhotu Ram's assertion that the Unionist Party enshrined in it those principles and values that are universal in appeal and application, objective in reference and valid for all rational beings alike — that is to say, not for this or that community, religion or race. Time is not far away, he once thundered, "When people will realize that my creed is the only creed which will cure this province, and for the matter of that, this country of all the evils and troubles of communalism from which it is suffering at present. The party to which I have the honour to belong does not recognize narrow sectarianism and it does not exist for the benefit of one religion or caste. In fact, it is the only one which can admit into its fold members whether Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or Christians. This party is not based on religion, and hence whenever any religious or semi-religious or semi-religious question comes up before the Council, its members are completely free to vote according to the dictates of their conscience. It is not the party of the urban Hindus which changes its creed everyday nationalists because it pays its members to play the role of nationalists. At another time it takes up the cause of the Hindu because there is a demand in the market for such a creed. Lastly, we find the members of this party going into the ranks of the supporters of the Governments and doing everything to win its favour."⁴

The Ministry-making Exercise

The second Reformed Council, constituted in 1923, registered a marked political advance over the first. Those who had been elected to it were far more conscious of their

⁴ PLC., 1ST May 1931

rights and obligations. They had a better understanding of the emerging state of affairs around them, especially the aims and objectives of the new political dispensation. It seems that much before the election they had sought to bind themselves in the disciplines of an organization. While in the first Council there was only one such organization, viz. the Rural Bock in the second a few more political parties had been added to the list. The most promising of them was the Unionist Party which claimed to be secular in its credentials. There was this time a new party, the Punjab Swaraj Party, which was mostly confined to the urban Hindus, with a strength of twelve elected members. Another feature of the election this time was a written manifesto of most parties, making the electorate more informed about the candidates they were called upon to vote for. There was yet another little known party, the Khilafat Party represented by three Muslim members. Fazl-i-Hussain commanded respect and influence of most Muslim councillors, including Hindus and Sikhs. The Unionists far exceeded the strength of the opposition: thirty nine as against thirty-two. Although the Unionist Party was predominately a Muslim party, yet it showed better results in promoting inter-communal harmony. That was why the party could bravely survive communal onslaughts from other quarters.

Fazl-i-Hussain had ample time now at his disposal to formulate and finalise his-Ministry-making plan in consultation with Chhotu Ram. After prolonged discussion it was agreed by both that the other minister should be a representative of an agriculturists class from a rural constituency. True to his earlier word. Chhotu Ram proposed the name of Lal Chand to which Fazl-i-Hussain readily consented. Lal Chand, in his capacity as a Unionist, was

sworn in as Minister of Agriculture. With Chhotu Ram's efforts, he now enjoyed the confidence of several rural Hindu councillors, mostly those belonging to the south-east Punjab.

Having been immensely impressed with Chhotu Ram's organizing skill and qualities of leadership, the Hindus of the Mahasabha bandwagon began to draw closer both Chhotu Ram and Lal Chand to their camp. But they were soon disillusioned when they learnt that Chhotu Ram was a man of a secular ideology. Thereupon, they approached Matu Ram and helped him in filing an election petition against Lal Chand. For this they raised money by public subscription to which the moneylenders contributed liberally. The petition was found to contain irregularities and Lal Chand's election was declared void, and this unfortunately for the second time. He therefore, tendered his resignation as minister⁵, giving rise to speculations about the next possible incumbent.

Within a short time of his observation of members' performance in the Council, Fazl-i-Hussain had convinced himself that Chhotu Ram stood head and shoulders above all his Unionist colleagues not only in defending official programmes and policies but was also possessed of an innovative frame of mind. It took him no time, therefore, to appoint Chhotu Ram as the next incumbent. The urban Hindu Councillors raised hue and cry, as was their wont. The Tribune, reacted by saying that there was experienced persons among the Hindus who could be considered for this position. No less sharp was the reaction of the Milap, which said that the British have provided encouragement to the Jat secessionism by nominating a Jat as minister. The daily Pratap commented

⁵ He was appointed as Revenue Minister in the Bharatpur State with the help of Chhotu Ram.

in a similar vein. All such comments and criticisms were along the expected lines and did not surprise the Unionists, much less Chhotu Ram himself.

The Party's First-ever Election Manifesto

As a leader of the Unionist Party, it devolved upon Chhotu Ram to state the broad objectives and the future programmes and policies of the Party for the forthcoming election to the Assembly under the Provincial Autonomy Act of 1935. This model manifesto of the Party, as drafted by Chhotu Ram, was a total novelty in the history of the Indian electioneering campaign. It was meant to be the voter's guide in the choice of a party for which he could freely exercise his franchise. The contents of the Manifesto should easily convince the reader of his refreshing approach to the problems he thought the party would have to face in the future. This calls for the need to reproduce the historic document here in full detail, hoping that it would give the reader the exact idea as to the seriousness which Chhotu Ram sought to grapple with the problems he could be called upon to solve as the leader of the Party. The document reads:

The voters of the Punjab', the Manifesto stated, will soon be called upon to elect representatives to the Provincial Legislature under the new constitution. The new Council will be called the Provincial Legislative Assembly, and will differ in certain important particular respects from the present Legislative Council. The main differences between the composition and power of the existing and the proposed new legislature will be as follows: (a) In the present Council there are 14 official members, 9 nominated non-official

members and 71 elected members; in new; Council; the total number of members will be 175 and they will be elected; there will be no nominated or official member. (b) At present the Government of the province is divided into two sets or departments called 'Reserved' and 'Transferred' respectively' the former comprises the more important departments such as finance, law and order, land revenue, etc. and their policies and budgets are not subject to the effective control of the Legislative Council. On the other hand, the "Transferred" departments are under the Ministers controlled by the Legislative Council. This division of Reserved and Transferred departments will disappear under the new constitution, and all departments, subject to certain special responsibilities of the Governor, will be placed under the Ministers and controlled by the new legislature. (c) The provincial cabinet of the present constitution worked under certain obvious advantages and disadvantages. Practically half of their personnel was not responsible to Council, while it was practically impossible for the Ministers to push through any important measures which had not the blessings of bureaucracy. On the other hand, Ministers, drawn from different parties, sometimes, with diametrically opposite programmes could continue in office with the help of the official and nominated bloc and the orientation of various interests in the legislature, made it opposite programmes, could continue in office, with the help of the official and nominated bloc, even if the majority of the elected members opposed some of them.

This state of affairs is expected to change under the new constitution under which the Governor would invite

the leader having the largest support from amongst the newly elected members to accept the chief ministership and to select for Governor's approval other persons whom he would like to include in his cabinet as Ministers. This ministry will then frame policies and run the Government of the province, It will remain in office so long as it commands the confidence of the majority of the members, and will resign and go out of office when a vote of no-confidence is passed against it; and (d) the members elected to the new legislature will later be called upon to elect representatives to the proposed new Federal Assembly at Delhi, and thus indirect election will take the place of direct election by the voters to the present Legislative Assembly.

The aforesaid factors are significant and suggest the following important considerations: (i) For the first time, under the British Rules, the Government of the Punjab is coming in the hands of the Punjabees. Its success or failure will primarily rest with us. (ii) the voters have an irresistible opportunity of getting their voice heard and their legitimate grievances redressed. The right to vote can no longer be treated as an indifferent matter to be neglected or exercised, on no longer be treated as an indifferent matter to be neglected or exercised, on personal, caste, or family considerations, without regard to the issues involved; and (iii) the work before the new legislature would require strict discipline and rigid alignment on party lines. No individual members, howsoever great or influential, can deliver the goods. The future power will be in the hands of the majority party in the legislature, and if we want our rights vindicated and programmes executed, we should vote not only for the right man but also for the right party.

The experience of other countries and the verdict of history alike emphasise the importance of running elections on party basis. The logic of this proposition is obvious. Responsible Government means that the party in majority in the legislature will run the Government. Candidates who do not seek election on the basis of any specific programme or party are dark horses; while others who are return on the basis of a definite programme or with a direct party label declare what they are striving for. The art of responsible governments, therefore, consists in evolving a constructive programme, consistent with one's convictions, which is likely to appeal to the majority of voters and may rally round it the majority of compromise; otherwise any individual member by a single stroke of the pen may on earth or may make fantastic election pledges guaranteeing magic fulfilment of everyone's desires, but unless he can mobilize the majority of the reasonable elements in the province in support of his programme he and his party can only remain a cry in the wilderness or claim were academic achievements. Accordingly, practical politics and constructive statesmanship demand that in considering the relatives merits and demerits of various programmes and parties, the following points should be kept prominently in view: (a) How far does the particular programme of a party ensure the support of principles and policies which are in the best interests of the voters concerned? (b) What is the likely strength which the leaders of the party concerned can reasonably secure in the legislature, and whether the number of their supporters in the legislature is likely to be able to deliver goods?

The problem of the Punjab is essentially an economic problem. The population of the province is nearly 57 per

cent. Muslims, 28 per cent. Hindus, and 13 per cent. Sikhs; and about 90 per cent, of them live directly or indirectly, by agriculturc. But whether they belong to one community or the other, and agriculture. But whether they belong to one community or the other, and irrespective of their being agriculturists or non-agriculturists, rural or urban, it has been estimated that the average income of a Punjabee is less than the expense of the clothing and feeding of a prisoner in the Punjab jails. Moreover, above 80 per cent of the proprietors are involved in debt which amounts to 40 times the land revenue, which annual interest charges alone are nearly ten times the total land revenue of the province. The fall in agricultural prices has further intensified the economic distress. Unemployment is rampant. Graduates have been seen cleaning shoes in the streets, and the pathetic tale of promising youths committing suicide due to tack of employment is a call which no patriotic Punjabee can afford to ignore. This is the real problem: the problem of poverty and starvation. which is staring the Punjab in the face and demands the most earnest and collective efforts from the best of the Punjabees. It affects all communities alike, urbanites as well as ruralites, agriculturists as well as non-agriculturists. Govenrment service can at best absorb about 3 in every thousand of the population; 997 still remain. Moreover, it is obvious that the communal demands must, before long, be either met or settled, and the agonizing pains of economic inequities and starvation will. unless treated in time, exhibit their symptoms in the language of fire and blood. The country wants bread, and a patriotic constructive party cannot afford to postpone or ignore this vital issue.

There are five main schools of political thought in the province between which the Punjabees voter must make his choice. They are as follows: (a) Those whose immediate programme is merely destructive. They declare that they are dissatisfied with the present constitution and Government will have nothing to do with either. Even if this group condescend to enter the Council, they shall do so only in order to wreck them. They propose pursuing this line till such time as the ideal constitution and Government drop from the heavens. They forget that in politics it is worthwhile to mend what you cannot end. (b) Those reactionaries who dread any change, howsoever beneficial, and believe in personal aggrandisement through a blind worship of, he authorities for the time being. They are out of time, out of tune. They forget that the days of sycophancy are gone, and that they cannot make today like yesterday. (c) Those representatives of moneyed classes who preach political liberty from house-tops but seek to perpetuate economic exploitation. They would give the voter the free right to make and unmake Ministries provided he meekly submits to their lancet of economic bleeding (d) The Communists who would like to deprive everybody of private property, under appeal of captivating slogans. They forged the hold of the classes of the present fabric of society and tile other obvious limitations on the wild theories which they advocate. They forget the evolution is the surest basis of reform. They have no immediate constructive programme: and (e) those practical progressives who take due not of the existing circumstances are prepared to make the best use of the available machinery, and would continue trying for the better. They advocate that we must make the best possible use of existing facilities for the present generation so that they may be better fitted to prepare the

stage for the next generation. It is to be this group that the National Unionist Party belongs.

The programme of the National Unionist Party is an open secret. Its creed and programme are detailed.... They show that the party stands for a good practical and useful creed, and a statement of its main planks is as follows: (a) the establishment of national self-respect, which had been rudely shaken in 1919 and had tended to go down lately. Under this head, the party pledges itself to work for Dominion Status by all constitutional means at as early a date as practicable, for the establishment of provincial autonomy *de facto*, for independence of thought and expression and purity in public life, and for the maintenance of proper relations between the authorities and all people of the province. (b) the Provision of equal opportunities and facilities for all special solicitude for the backward classes and area. In this connection the party pledges itself to push forward a programme of constructive uplift all round-rural as well as urban-the improvement of living conditions in the villages as well as towns, the support of the Land Alienation Act as a measure for the protection of backward classes, the improvement of beneficent activities through reduction in the cost of administration consistently with efficiency, fair and equitable distribution of taxation between the various classes and the development of the educational, social and cultural life of the province on proper lines. (c) the economic readjustment and planning of the province is the main plank of the party's programme. In this connection the party pledges itself to work for agricultural and industrial development the encouragement of cottage industries, the raising of income and production per head, the relief of indebtedness, the

removal of unemployment and an equitable adjustment of the reasonable claims of the *haves* and the *have -nots*, for the landlords and the tenants, and for the employers and the labourers. (d) The party programme assures to each community its religious and cultural integrity as the best basis of national unity, denying the claim of any community to dictate to others, and in case of conflicts, the party stands for settling the disputes on the principles of toleration, negotiation and justice. The party creed recognises economic affinity as the strongest and surest basis of common action, and the so-called communal differences as relative minor issues. As such, it is understood that members of the party, belonging to different communities, may be at liberty to pursue whatever line they may choose, on such rare occasions, if any, when purely communal matters come under discussion on which no agreed line of action has been evolved in the party. (e) As to the working of the Reforms, the party regards the new constitution as most unsatisfactory, but in view of the obvious limitations involved sees no good in trying to wreck or boycott it. As such it seeks to make the best use of whatever opportunity of doing good is available under the new constitution, and would simultaneously join the other constructive and progressive parties in the country for further constitutional advance.

This programme, however, is by no means exhaustive nor it is the last word on the subject. It is an appeal to all patriotic Punjabees who think on the lines enunciated in the creed to cooperate together in the best interests of the province. Any constructive amendment in the creed could be made within the party while special clauses, according to the requirements of individual constituencies, could be added with the approval of the party.

It is admitted that the National Unionist Party is the largest single party in the Council today. It hopes also to be the largest party in the new legislature and may form the Government of the province under the new constitution. Its creed caters for the most pressing requirements of province. It affords free scope, within the party creed, for different shades of opinion. As such, the voters who see eyes to eye with this programme should ascertain from various candidates seeking their support, whether any candidate who does not support the creed, the programmes of the work, is not entitled to your vote should only vote for the candidate who supports the creed and the programme of work of the Unionist Party.

The National Unionist Party is not new, it has been functioning for over 12 years and has, in spite of obvious limitations, achieved useful results. The following items may be cited as some of its main achievements, directly or indirectly: (a) The Land Revenue Act has been amended so as to fix the terms of a normal settlement at a minimum of 40 years and the State's share at a maximum of 25 per cent of the net assets, while the measures of enhancement have been restricted to a similar maximum of the assessment of the preceding settlement in any particular circle. Before this amendment the State could claim a maximum of 50 per cent of the net assets, and there was no limit to the measure of enhancement. (b) The Regulation of Accounts Bill was passed which offered protection to the debtor against some of the malpractices of the moneylender. (c) Two very important amendments were made in the Punjab Land Alienation Act to stop leakages and make possible certain rulings of the Lahore High Court which permitted sale of land against provisions of the Land Alienation Act when an

agriculturist was declared insolvent and also permitted alienation of land for any period in execution of a decree. (d). Two very important measures, one for the relief of indebtedness and the other for the protection of debtors, have been passed. (e) Two important committee were appointed for suggesting retrenchment in administration and new sources of revenue. An annual reduction of nearly two crores, a good deal of which is permanent, was made in expenditure. The Tobacco Vend Fees Act and Entertainment Duty Bill have passed, and the Transfer of Property was applied to the urban area with a view to securing fresh revenue (f) The Party has supported many reasonable proposals for the reform of jail and police, and for check on corruption among officials. (g) the Work of beneficent activities including rural uplift and reconstruction speak for themselves and are obvious to anyone who compare the position of the province in the pre-reform days to that of today. The improvements introduced include better sanitation, water-supply, medical relief, education roads, and credit facilities, rural dispensaries for men as well as animals have been provided throughout the province. Moreover, new intermediate colleges, libraries, reading rooms, night schools, inter-village roads, and improvement of cooperative movement stand to the credit of the party. (h) Depressed Class Pupils: All aided schools were called upon to admit depressed class students in pain of losing their grant-in-aid. The basis of local self-government has been broadened through regular appointment of small town committees and panchayats, and democratising municipalities and District Boards. Moreover, substantial beginnings have been made for the industrial development of the province. Members of the Party have filled With dignity responsible appointments, such as the Governorship of the province, Executive

Councillorship of the Government of India, Presidentship of the Legislative Council and membership and ministership in the Punjab, which has justified the claim of Indians to fill the highest posts under the Crown, (i) Water rates were enhanced in 1924 to the extent of 75 lakhs, but the Unionist Party succeeded in securing reduction of over 60 lakhs. Further reduction of about 37.50 lakhs annual has been secured in abiana.

These achievements speak for themselves and deserve well of all fair-minded Punjabees. It is not claimed, however, that everything possible has been achieved. The financial stringency and the obvious limitation of the present constitution were a great handicap on the potentialities of the Party. Moreover, due to the Council experience being new to many members, some of them have at times displayed lack of proper discipline. These defects, however, should improve with experience and the voters taking watchful interest in the activities of the Party. It improve with experience and the voters taking watchful interest in the activities of the Party. It must also be recognized that forthcoming responsibilities under the new constitution call for a far-sighted, liberal and broad-minded outlook from the members of the Party, on all provincial questions affecting ruralities as well as urbanites. agriculturists as well as non-agriculturists. The revised creed of the Party takes due note of it. Its translation in practice must rest with the members who join the Party. The Future Programme is for uplift, personal, spiritual, moral, intellectual economical not only personal, not only of families, but also of the poor, the masses, the needy and the backward. It is this noble work of uplift with which we should concern ourselves, irrespective of

consideration of caste, colour and creed. Thus, the prescription which thoughtful Indians prescribe for the betterment of India in magic uplift at home securing her people honourable position abroad.

[The election. Manifesto prepared by Chhotu Ram created waves and produced effect. The Unionist Party emerged as the most powerful political organization with 101 seats to its credit. The next largest Party was the Congress with just 20 seats. The National Progressive Party of non-agriculturist Hindus trailed behind, with just 5 seats. The Muslim League had to be content with just 2 seats. The Unionists were all praise for the phenomenal electoral success of the party. It was soon after that Chhotu Ram became the undisputable leader of the entire Punjab political scenario. He was knighted soon after. There was jubilation all around. It was a humiliation for all his enemies in the political world. Destiny was fully with Chhotu Ram]

First Term as Minister

The much awaited induction of Chhotu Ram into the cabinet on 22nd September 1924 marked the emergence of an era of better prospects for peace and progress in an otherwise communally sensitive Province. Fazl-i-Hussain had long been desperately in search of a trusted ally who could share the stress and strain of the turbulent Unionist Party. In Chhotu Ram he noticed a rich treasure of golden qualities that could adequately meet the challenges posed by the critics of the Party from time to time. The most formidable and frequent were those posed by the Muslim League communalism; another, of course of less intensity, came from the British bureaucracy to which the increasing popularity and influence of the Unionist Party was a constraunt eyesore. Though set so far apart in space, both the leaders had proceeded along similar lines to reach a common point of the political destination. Chhotu Ram began with the leadership of the Jats, but political expediency necessarily presupposed the subordination of narrow, casteist stance to a universally acceptable standpoint. Obviously, such a standpoint had, of necessity, to be truly representative of that characteristic which was commonly shared by the Jats and non-Jats alike — the characteristic of their being agriculturist by vocation, based neither on caste nor creed,

race or religion. Likewise, Fazl-i-Hussain began as a leader of the Rural Party which in its inception was a Muslim organization; but a sound political philosophy required him to subordinate the communal to the universal standpoint. This he did by throwing open the gates of his Party to the Hindus and Sikhs alike.¹ This was how both were able to involve a political strategy that ultimately led them to the concept of the Unionist Party. Thus, Fazl-i-Hussain's choice for Chhotu Ram as a minister was, from a political and constitutional point of view, a great success which contributed in no small measure to the success of dyarchy in the Punjab.²

Setting the Administrative Tone

Soon after his taking over, a clandestine attempt was made to promote a veterinary assistant to the post of superintendent, and the file was sent to the Minister with the case duly recommended by the British heads of three departments, viz., veterinary, finance and agriculture. The vigilant Minister wanted to satisfy himself before accepting the recommendation. On a close scrutiny he found that a competent officer had been bypassed without rhyme or reason. The file was returned without the Minister's agreeing to the recommendation. The concerned bureaucrats got worked up and took up the matter with the Governor, who invited Chhotu Ram to discuss the issue with him. The Governor's view was that in matters like promotion it was customary to go by the recommendation of the head of the department

¹ FH., p.-151

² *Ibid.*, p.-156

concerned. The Minister's rejoinder was that in normal cases the practice was to accept the recommendation of the head of the department concerned, but if there was a *prima facie* case of injustice done to an honest, competent officer, the Minister could intervene and provide justice to him. With requisite feedback having been given to the Governor, by Chhotu Ram, his viewpoint was accepted. The tenacity with which he continued to cling to his viewpoint was obviously a warning to the entire bureaucracy. This was how a tone was set for an efficient and responsible administration.

Governor Hailey's Move a *Damp Squib*

The ever growing stature of the Unionist Party had started giving the British bureaucrats sleepless nights. They did not want that any political party should be in a position to dominate the Punjab scene., for in that case it could at some stage think of wresting power and declare independence on its own. One way to thwart the possibility of any such move which suited the British administrators was to encourage, and even patronize, parties like the Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha, Akali Dal. etc. It was the time-tested magic which could work wonders as and when they liked. But this magic was not going to affect the Unionist Party which had at its command a large following and a team of seasoned politicians.

A time came when the Unionist Party was confronted with a serious challenge. Under the Constitution of 1919 the first president of the Council was to be nominated by the Governor, but on the expiry of his term he was to be replaced by an elected president in 1925. Casson's term was

to expire that year and his place was taken by an elected president. A little time before his retirement, had managed ingraute himself into the Guvernor's eyes, who wanted him to be elected for another term. There were three other contestants in the field — Abdul Qadir, Gokal Chand Narang and Shah Nawaz. To smoothen the record straight for his candidate the Governor invited the threë candidates to his office and persuaded them to withdraw from the contest in favour of Casson. To make his candidate's success doubly sure, the Governor prevailed upon some other members of the Council to express their solidarity for Casson in writing. Raja Narendra Nath and Bhai Jodh Singh were named the Governor's emissaries. There were still some members who were neutral and claimed to have no stakes in the contest. And, if there was any, it was to see that a crushing defeat was inflicted on the Unionist candidate.

Just around this time Fazl-i-Hussain was convalescing at Buchiana after a serious ailment. Chhotu Ram rushed to Buchiana to apprise his colleague of the gravity of the situation. On reaching Lahore Fazl-i-Hussain expressed himself in favour of an amicable settlement with the cooperation of like-minded members of the Council. He advised both Abdul Qadir and Shah Nawaz to remain in the contest and write to the Governor of their resolve. He deputed Chhotu Ram to meet personally the Hindu Mahasabha leaders like Gokal Chand Narang, Raja Narendra Nath and Nanak Chand. These leaders came out with the condition that they would withdraw their support from the Governor's candidate in case the Unionist leaders assured them of their unconditional support to their own candidate. Chhotu Ram was at a loss to understand how there could be two Hindus in the Council

with two key positions — one a Minister and the other the President of the Council. He was prepared to agree with them to the extent that they could put up their candidate for the office of the Deputy President and ask for the Unionists' support.

However, with no compromise in sight, both Fazl-i-Hussain and Chhotu Ram vowed to make Casson lick the dust. Both were upset by the intransigence of certain parties, especially the Hindu Mahasabha. The Governor's excuse was that he had put up his candidate because there was no consensus candidate amongst the Indians. Both Unionist Leaders met the Governor and impressed upon him the need to reconsider his viewpoint, for a Britisher could not be a representative of an Indian political institution. For both, the Governor's move was contrary to the letter and spirit of the Montague-Chelmsford recommendation.

In the final tally, only two candidates were in the contest — Abdul Qadir of the Unionist Party and Gokal Chand Narang of the Hindu Mahasabha. Abdul Qadir, who was Deputy President of the Council, was declared elected with forty-one votes to his credit. While his arch rival, Gokal Chand Narang, scored thirty-two. The victory of Abdul Qadir further boosted the image of the Unionist Party, while Governor Malcolm Hailey confessed it was his own loss.

One more Unionist Feat

In 1925 Fazl-i-Hussain was nominated as the Revenue Member by the Governor. The portfolio fell under the category of 'Reserved Subject'. Chhotu Ram was given the additional charge of the portfolio vacated by Fazl-i-Hussain. Soon intense

lobbying came into play. Raja Narendra Nath and Bhai Jodh Singh had joined hands, to ensure that the vacancy was not grabbed by a Unionist or by a Unionist-sponsored candidate. Bhai Jodh Singh succeeded in emerging as the official nominee of the Sikh lobby, supported by the anti-Unionist factions. The Governor consulted Chhotu Ram on the issue and was told that it would not be in the interest of the Punjab to usher in a coalition government by inducting some one from a communal party. The Governor was high impressed with Chhotu Ram's frankness and asked him to suggest a name with a committed peasant ideology. Initially, two names were suggested — Sardar Gurbakhsh Singh and Sardar Datar Singh. Meanwhile, another name was added to the list - Sardar Jogender Singh, who, surprisingly, was not even a member of the Council. Bhai Jodh Singh met Fazl-i-Hussain and sought his help and blessing. Fazl-i-Hussain asked him to meet Chhotu Ram, for he alone could say something definite about the matter under discussion. But by this time Chhotu Ram had publicly announced the name of Jogender Singh as a candidate to be sponsored for the coveted vacancy. Jogender Singh belonged to no party, yet he was being sponsored because his affinity with the Unionist Party was considered as an asset. Chhotu Ram's liking for Jogender Singh was a tactical move. In his view, Jogender Singh was not merely a zamindar but also one who had waged struggles for the protection of the rights of the zamindars. That was the reason why Chhotu Ram was not willing to have a non-zamindar as an ally of the Unionist Party. In order to brighten the chances of his victory. Bhai Jodh Singh managed to obtain an injunction from the Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee to the effect that a Sikh, not nominated by it, could not seek election, and this was duly communicated to the Governor.

The Governor invited Chhotu Ram to express his opinion on the crucial issue. Chhotu Ram was against such injunction, for, in his view, it amounted to the interference of religion in what was purely a political issue. But Chhotu Ram was not the one to be easily swept off his feet. He was fully determined to keep Jodh Singh out of the Council. In order to make the chances of Jogender Singh bright, he persuaded a Sikh member, Mangal Singh, to resign his Council seat in favour of Jogender Singh. All this was because Chhotu Ram wanted to broaden the base of the Zamindar League. Jogender Singh captured the coveted Agriculture Minister's portfolio.

Public Welfare Projects

After assuming the charge as Minister of Agriculture and Industry in September 1924 (and subsequently as Education Minister). Chhotu Ram's endeavour was to give priority to all that could be done to relieve and resurrect the peasantry into a life of happiness and prosperity. As expected, his first priority was to make water available for the drought-prone, arid areas. At that time a private company had been promised help in starting an ambitious project, known as the Madhopur Hydro-Electric Scheme. The Government had also undertaken for its own implementation another similar project, called the Mandi Hydro-Electric Scheme. Incidentally, the project happened to fall within a predominantly Muslim area, and this gave the Hindu leaders a stick to beat the Unionists with. Attempts were made to malign Chhotu Ram as an enemy of the Hindu Zamindars and a friend of Muslims. When a demand for Rs. 1,64,83,000 was presented in the House, his Hindu Mahasabha detractors put forward cut motions on the plea that the project was

ill-conceived and too expensive for its utility. Anticipating such a situation. Chhotu Ram had constituted a Committee which consisted of some members of the House. besides the incharge of the Madhopur project. Those who had special qualifications were Sir Frederic Gebbre, Captain Whittakar, and G. Webb, who had experience of such projects by being associated with them in Norway and Sweden. The Committee in its report had expressed its full appreciation for all that was being done. In the opinion of the members the project was more useful than that allocated to the Madhopur company. Obviously, the opposition camp found itself caught on the wrong foot.

But Chhotu Ram was more worried about the arid. southern districts. like Hisar. Bhiwani, Mahendergarh, etc. These areas had scanty rainfall and were mostly drought-prone. They were visited by famines, often in close succession. With inadequate availability of water, the agricultural produce per acre was much below the normal of the Western districts like Lyallpur. That was one reason why the cultivators were often compelled to mortgage their lands to their creditors, resulting in large scale alienations and transfers of landholdings. Chhotu Ram as a lawyer had taken up many cases of such types and successfully defended them in courts. But, unfortunately. neither the moneylenders nor the law of the land were anywhere near the point where a line of distinction could be drawn between the divine and the demon.

Chhotu Ram was clear in his mind that the problem of providing irrigation facilities to large tracts of land in the southern districts did not admit of any easy solution. This problem presented itself more forcefully when he entered the Council in 1923 and heard there that an Englishman,

engineer by profession, had done some spade work on building a huge reservoir for water somewhere near the mountainous Bhakra. He also learnt that the plan in its blue prints was available in the concerned office at Lahore. On gathering the requisite information he felt convinced that it could suit his need down to the ground. From that time onwards Chhotu Ram diligently followed the work which, when he took over as Minister in 1924, had started. This was the lifeline of the peasants who for centuries had been leading a life of poverty. Keeping in view the importance of the project as a symbol of pride and prosperity, we intend to offer a comprehensive exposition thereof in a later chapter.

Punjab, the province of five rivers,³ (Punj means five and aab means water or river) had plenty of potential for providing irrigation facilities for its agriculturists. Chhotu Ram created a network of canals which provided irrigation facilities for almost the entire year. This was the reason why peasants in Western Punjab were more prosperous than their counterparts in the Ambala Division. And for this very reason the incidence of indebtedness was much lower in the irrigated areas. A similar network of roads was created, providing connectivity to all towns and big villages with one another. This made things much easier for the peasants who had to take their agricultural produce to the mandis mostly in bullock-carts. In almost all villages, with a population above ten thousand, veterinary centres were opened, and schemes were launched for providing incentives to those who possessed bulls and buffaloes of high breed. The 'murra' pedigree of buffaloes was much in demand outside the province. Dispensaries were opened in villages which happened to be

³ The five rivers are : Sutlej, Ravi, Jhelum, Beas and Chenab.

five or more miles away from the towns. In times of natural calamities, such as hailstorms, locusts, floods, drought, tacavi loans were given to the farmers whose crop had been damaged or destroyed, partially or wholly. Chhotu Ram knew well the difficulties of the peasants in need of money at reasonable rates of interest, and started the network of cooperative societies, but for quite a long time the pace of such financial institutions had to be slow because of paucity of funds at their disposal.

Chhotu Ram was very much alive to the need for paying attention to the different aspects of social reconstruction. It is pertinent to point out in this context that some such work had already been undertaken by F.L. Brayne who had taken over as Deputy Commissioner of Gurgaon in 1920. Soon after taking over, he undertook a survey of the entire district for purposes of planned development of education, health, sanitation, village industries etc. After spending years to arrive at certain broad conclusions of the survey, he drew up a detailed plan of action which he shared with Chhotu Ram on his appointment as Minister in 1924.

In his study of the survey report he found that there were many factors that accounted for the backwardness of the rural society. These he divided into two classes: those that were natural, such as hailstorms, drought, floods, etc; and those that were inherent in the very lifestyle of the rural populace. While for the former category he planned digging of wells as the available sources of irrigation on perennial basis; for the latter, he put his trained staff on field duties and entrusted with the task of educating the peasants on

their problems, such as the causes of their backwardness in the sphere of education, health, etc. But more important than this was to introduce the peasants to new methodologies and researches in the field of agriculture and animal husbandry. Special incentives were provided to farmers who used improved varieties of seeds and agricultural implements. They were also introduced to new techniques of preparing compost manure.

It was believed that a systematic and consistent rural planning, when converted into mass action, must produce the desired results. Brayne had at the same time converted himself into a committed social reformer, and had earned both praise and encouragement from the entire Unionist Party.

Needless to say, the entire task was difficult, with no immediate result to be expected. To quote Brayne himself: “Our object in Gurgaon has been to jerk the villager out of his old groove, convince him that improvement is possible to kill his fatalism by demonstrating that both climate, disease and pests can be successfully fought. He must be laughed out of his uneconomic and unhealthy customs and taught better ways of living and farming. Further, the secret of our success was to deal with the whole of village life, to take the whole district as the field of operations and to deluge the areas with every form of propaganda and publicity that could be devised or adopted or afforded. Uplift is a mass movement, a combined assault and no area, no part of life, and no method of attack can be neglected.”

“All of us”, said Chhotu Ram, “are agreed that more attention ought to be paid to the welfare of rural areas. There is no disagreement on that point. But in what particular manner

that rural reconstruction ought to be brought about, or what particular methods should be adopted by the Rural Reconstruction Department is a matter of opinion, and on a matter like this opinions might easily differ, and they do differ. But so far as general subject of rural reconstruction is concerned, I think we are agreed that more money should be spent on that object, and that more attention should be paid to that subject.”⁴

Despite the fact that crores of rupees had been spent in the name of rural reconstruction, nothing tangible was the outcome. At one stage the expenditure on the scheme was beyond all proportions. So the retrenchment committee had been asked to recommend cuts in all wasteful expenditure. But nothing was done in this regard. That is what Chhotu Ram himself found to his dismay: “The Rural Reconstruction Department”, he once startled the House, “is an entirely useless department. A good part of the money spent on it finds its way into foreign countries. It is all waste of money, while the zamindars are starving and are going about almost naked.”⁵

One main reason why the Gurgaon project could not yield the desired results was the premature transfer of Brayne. Chhotu Ram’s portfolio was shifted to Education for administrative compulsion. The outcome was disastrous. Those who were left to work in the fields slackened their efforts, with the result that the entire project became a safe haven for “a few Government officers to keep them busy and get their pays.” What had once raised high hopes ended in a fiasco. Before relinquishing his job, Brayne wrote about

⁴ PLC., vol. xxvi. p.-179

⁵ PLC., vol xxviii. pp.-201-2

Chhotu Ram: "He was quick and decisive and knew his own mind, yet would listen and discuss and could never disagree except on honest grounds."

Besides agriculture, the other portfolio Chhotu Ram was entrusted with was that of Industries. It was his view that agriculture alone could not be the panacea for all ills of the province; agriculture alone, he said, could not bear the entire pressure of increasing economic growth and development. This pressure could be relieved in two ways: by bringing new areas under cultivation and starting industries, both large scale and small scale. In this context, he once observed: "Industries are being neglected to an extent. to which they were never neglected in any really progressive country."

The Unionist regime always stressed the importance of small scale cottage industries as the main source of rural employment. They can be undertaken with a reasonably low capital and manpower. Rope-making, certain forms of weaving such as nivar-making, durree-making, basket-making, bee-keeping, sericulture, poultry farming, soap-making, cheese and butter-making, tailoring, dyeing, carpentry, shoe-making, were some of the cottage industries which the Government wanted to promote in the rural areas.

But it was equally clear to Chhotu Ram that large scale industries, too, were indispensable for a progressive and prosperous Punjab. He was unhappy because not many large scale industries had come to be established on the Punjab soil. One of the well-known industrialists of his times was Harkishan Lal who had pioneered starting tannery in the province. The Punjab Government wanted "to set up a model

tannery under his care which could serve as an example for small village tanneries in the neighbourhood and in the Province generally.” Before this model tannery was set up in the Province, students had been sent to England to study all about tanning, and this became a heavy item of expenditure on the exchequer. But the Government did not bother much about the criticism from the opposition benches. Tannery proved much useful and soon picked up in many parts of the province. To protect the interests of industrial workers, the Government passed the Punjab Hours of Work Bill. Another important feature of Chhotu Ram’s industrial policy was the scheme of advancing loans to those business houses which could offer reliable securities, Even those desirous of starting small scale industries in rural areas were given loans on reasonable rates of interest. Also, loans on reasonable rates were provided to the educated unemployed who possessed the requisite ability, talent and desire to set up their own industries, but who had no financial resources of their own to do so. Provision was also made for money which was placed at the disposal of Deputy Commissioner of each district, for the promotion of cottage and village industries. Chhotu Ram was emphatic that all items of luxury imported from outside the country shall be heavily taxed to promote and protect indigenous industries. It was Chhotu Ram’s sincere endeavour to make industries as much a part of the economic activity of the province as agriculture. He wanted both to develop *pari passu* with each other. He made liberal grants available to students willing to go to foreign countries in the pursuit of higher technological skills. He wanted to start industrial banks so that those industries which needed financial help, could continue their production, without the Government’s interference or recommendation.

As stated before, with Fazl-i-Hussain's joining the Viceroy's Executive Council in 1925, Chhotu Ram was shifted to Education Department. Soon after taking over, he was told that the two schools at Jhajjar and Bahadur Garh, run by the District Board, were being badly managed. He ordered both to be taken over by the Education Department. An intermediate college started working at Rohtak. In many villages, where there were no schools at all, primary schools were opened, and where there were primary schools, orders were soon issued for their upgradation to middle standard. Many high schools came into existence as a result of the upgradation policy.

Chhotu Ram was surprised that there was no provision for admission for the zamindar boys in the Rasul Engineering Institute. Accordingly, he ordered reservation of fifty percent seats for the students of zamindar families. He had the same policy in mind towards the two prestigious institutions- Veterinary College at Lahore, Government Agriculture College, Lyallpur and the Medical School at Amritsar. He set up a Committee to go into details about the opening of an Engineering College in the province.

It was during the ministership of Chhotu Ram that Arya Samaj had started opening schools in cities where the Hindu students were being imparted education both in arts and science. They had made debut in studies and were being given good jobs. All this was a source of suspicion for both Muslims and Christians. Before Chhotu Ram's taking over as Education Minister, such Arya Samaj schools were being discriminated against in the matter of recognition and grant-in-aid. When the matter was brought to Chhotu Ram's notice

he ordered all schools to be accorded the same treatment, irrespective of religious denomination.

Chhotu Ram was equally concerned over the lack of educational facilities for girls in rural areas. It was his firm view that denial of education to girls was as reprehensible as sin. He was shocked to know that there was no provision for education for girls anywhere in the Haryana region. He met some prominent Arya Samaj leaders and advised them to start ‘gurukuls’ for this purpose. He was convinced that gurukul education could make girls not only educated but also prepare them for better roles in families. He believed that Sanskrit education would give the rural girls a pride in their spiritual heritage and carry forward useful social customs and traditions. The surprising thing was that many dedicated social workers picked up the idea, collected funds and started gurukuls which became fairly popular with the passage of time.

A Word in Praise

During the short stint of a little over two years, Chhotu Ram remained associated as Minister with the three departments of agriculture, industries and education. He was fully determined to devote all his time and energy to the heavy load of work that these departments entailed. Even the minutest detail could not escape his notice. The wonderful progress these departments made forced even the bitterest of his critics to come out with words of praise. He did not approve any expenditure unless he had satisfied himself that all was transparent. If at all a testimony is needed here, Faizl-i-Hussain’s words must suffice. “Chaudhri Chhotu Ram”,

he said, "did excellent work as minister; his work as leader of the Unionist Party is unsurpassed by any leader of a Party in any of the provincial legislatures. The ability, the industry, the sincerity, the enthusiasm, the perseverance, the persistence, the courage and the independence, all of which he possessed in pre-eminent degrees have won him the gratitude of the party and of every member of the party."⁶

⁶ FH., p.-279

A Decade Exclusive to the Party

With the announcement of election to the third Council in 1926, much political activity of combinations and permutations had come into play on all sides. As on two previous occasions, this time also Chhotu Ram filed his nomination papers from the Jhajjar - Sonapat constituency. The Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress had a taste of Chhotu Ram's popularity in the constituency when they failed to find a suitable candidate. Bhagat Phool Singh, a noted social activist, issued a statement, calling upon the voters to rally behind Chhotu Ram. After a vigorous search, a resident of Bohar Village, Sher Singh, agreed to jump into the electoral fray, and for this he was heavily rewarded. Some of Chhotu Ram's supporters had negotiated a deal with him and he had agreed to withdraw from the contest for a price, but the move was discarded as ethically wrong and inconsistent with Chhotu Ram's political philosophy. Obviously, Chhotu Ram's victory was no one's surprise. To meet the requirement of law, his supporters had transferred five hundred bighas of land and a house to his name which he returned to the owners soon after the election with a deep sense of gratitude.

The Hostile Press

Having miserably failed to prevent Chhotu Ram's entry into the Council, his opponents made it a point to see that he was not given a ministerial berth by the Governor. The entire Lahore Press was ablaze emitting fire and fury against him. He had often been made an object of ridicule when he piloted many bills that aimed at ensuring relief and rehabilitation to the poor farmers; but he mustered sufficient strength and confidence and got them passed in the Council. The Hindu Mahasabhaites sent feelers this time also to bring him to their camp, but he declined the offer vehemently as being antagonistic to his secular credentials. The various political organizations trained their guns at him because he was not going to stop anywhere short of his goal. The press, controlled and owned by the hostile forces, was fully geared to demolish all chances of his getting inducted into the Cabinet. The various Lahore - based newspapers, both English and Vernacular, wrote articles and comments which often crossed limits of decency. Logic or no logic, truth or no truth, convincing or unconvincing, the press was busy vomiting venom unabated.

“A proposal has been made in certain quarters”, wrote the *Hindustan Times*, that His Excellency should increase the portfolios from two to three and nominate a minister from each of the three prominent communities to each of the three portfolios. We do not see any reason why the province should be taxed with sixty thousand rupees a year extra, merely to satisfy the communal demands of insatiable bigots in the province. Already there are three jobs in Government to which Indians are appointed and it is enough if communal parity is maintained by dividing these three jobs between

Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. The Hon'ble Sardar Joginder Singh, during the short time he has been incharge of the Agriculture and Industries portfolio, has earned the appreciation of all sections of the people in the Punjab. And it will be only proper if he is renominated. Chaudhari Chhotu Ram, the other minister, unfortunately is neither popular with members of other communities, nor does he command the confidence or the support of the Hindus in the Council and in the Province. To our mind, therefore, the Governor can have absolutely no justification for renominating Chaudhari Chhotu Ram for the second portfolio."

In its 17th December 1926 issue, the *Muslim Outlook* wrote:

"We personally urge that two of the three ministers should be Muslims, but we fear that Sir Malcolm Hailey is hardly strong and courageous enough to do justice to the Muslims of the Punjab. If therefore his Excellency does not or dare not face the fact that only a predominantly Muslim Ministry can be stable, he should do the next best thing and create a third portfolio for the Muslims. Then with a Muslim as Minister, the community would have a fairly effective voice in the executive administration. We must repeat here that the Muslims are not at all satisfied with the recent working of the rural Muslim Alliance so far as the work of Chaudhari Chhotu Ram is concerned."

"Responsible opinion in this Province does not expect his Excellency, who is too well informed and too wide awake a ruler, not to know the intense dissatisfaction which the choice of Ch. Lal Chand in the first instance and of Ch. Chhotu Ram later on, has caused among the enlightened

public opinion. While there is consensus of opinion, both among the Sikhs themselves and the general public, that Sardar Joginder Singh be reappointed a minister; public and especially Hindu opinion is absolutely united as regards the desirability of replacing Ch. Chhotu Ram by someone who is both more capable and efficient, and enjoys in a much larger measure the confidence of the Hindu members and the Hindu public. There are at least half a dozen Hindu members in the present Council and one of whom would do incomparably better than Ch. Chhotu Ram”

As if not having vomitted enough of venom against Chhotu Ram in its 15th December issue the paper reverted to the burning issue:

“There is not the least hesitation in saying that Ch. Chhotu Ram’s reappointment as minister would be looked upon as an utterly unwarranted disregard of non- Muslim opinion generally, and of Hindu feeling in particular.”

In its 12th December 1926 issue the *Sunday Times* wrote:

“It is in the interest of the administration that his Excellency should select men who command not only the confidence of communal parties in the House, but also will be capable of working the machinery of Government without unnecessary friction. We do not feel time has come when

HT. 16th December 1926. Obsessed with Hindu Communalism the paper writes : The only thing Sir Melcom Hailey can do out of consideration for the sentiments of Hindus, and consistent with parliamentary practice, is to call a Hindu Sabhaite to accept the Education portfolio.” And this was the same with Muslim papers who could not see anything beyond their communal gaze. Chhotu Ram was condemned because he did not see any place for a communal or religious creed.

his Excellency should increase the Executive Council to three ministers. Leaving aside the question of Sardar Joginder Singh, who is eminently suited to continue, we feel that the other two be appointed from the main blocks. On the Mohammaden side we do not think that His Excellency could find a fitter person and a more illustrious person than Sir Mohammad Iqbal. The same can be at once said of Mr. Manohar Lal or Raja Narendra Nath. As to Chaudhari Chhotu Ram, his own group has been reduced to half a dozen to the insignificant total of two. According to a widespread opinion, he must make way for more happily placed partymen.”

The Pratap in its 17th December 1926 issue wrote:

“When the Hindus protested against Mian Fazl-i-Hussain, Sir Malcolm Hailey appointed him a member of the executive council. Was this an affront on His Excellency’s part to apply the balm to the wounded hearts of the Hindus? His Excellency appointed Chaudhari Chhotu Ram as minister not because he was a representative of the Hindus, but because he could sing to Mian Fazl-i-Hussain’s pipe. The Hindus, who had no voice in the appointment of ministers, should not humiliate themselves by submitting petitions.”

It will not be out of place to say here, however, that on the eve of paying his tribute to the memory of late Chhotu Ram in the House, Dr. Sheikh Mohammad Alam was highly critical of the Press for its irresponsible outbursts against the late peasant ideologue.

“Let me in this connection point out that there were certain papers whose publication and livelihood mainly depended upon abusing Sir Chhotu Ram and by throwing

mud on him they used to get money. Now obviously the death of Sir Chhotu Ram has given a fatal blow to their profession. I pity those papers very much because now they would not be able to grab money which they have been doing so far.”

The New Ministry

After the election, all eyes were set on Governor Malcolm Hailey's ministry formation. Initially, there were straws in the winds which suggested Chhotu Ram being on the list of the probables. All such speculations were fuelled by four cogent reasons. First, Fazl-i-Hussain's standing commitment to extend all possible support to Chhotu Ram in this regard; second, the Unionists' strong backing, especially those who belonged to the rural areas; third, to give representation to the long neglected Ambala Division in developmental projects; and lastly, with Fazl -i-Hussain's taking over as the Revenue Member, which was a reserved subject, Chhotu Ram's claims could not be brushed aside if the Governor was at all fair-minded.

With Malcolm Hailey's stint of three years over, the new Governor, Geoffrey de Montmorency, set about the task of constituting a ministry which could work to his satisfaction for the next three years. Three considerations seem to have weighed with him: one, that his ministry should be such as to ensure peace and progress in the turbulent Punjab; and, two, that the wings of the Unionist Party were clipped in such a way that it could not fly higher than its size. After long deliberations, the Governor announced his list of the new ministers: Feroze Khan Noon (Unionist), Dr. Gokal

Chand Narang (Reform Party) and Joginder Singh (a representative of Sikh community). The ministry making was purely along the communal lines. Of these, Joginder Singh belonged to no party and claimed the support of the Unionist Party which sought to present an inter-communal image. Gokal Chand Narang's position was equally precarious, but the Governor assured him of the official block's support to keep him going. In the first Council, the two ministers, Fazl-i-Hussain and Harkishan Lal, were Congressmen and worked in a harmonious relationship; in the second Council, both ministers Fazl-i-Hussain and Chhotu Ram belonged to the Unionist Party. In the third Council the choice of the Governor was guided by the consideration that all the three principal communities---Hindu, Muslim and Sikh---be given representation in the interest of maintaining communal harmony in the Province. The Governor sought to justify his choice of the ministers by saying that individual members of the ministry were free to hold their own views and responsible for their departments. The eyebrows began to be raised when the Governor, instead of having a joint meeting of the three ministers, began to meet them individually. The possibility of mutual distrust and misunderstanding gave birth to internecine bickerings and even squabbles on the floor of the House. Bitterness had been lingering on between the Unionists and the Hindu Mahasabhis, and it assumed serious proportions in the new ministry. But this was perhaps the most fruitful policy of the British bureaucrats.

The Party Role of Chhotu Ram

With Chhotu Ram having been left out of the ministerial race, the Unionists were disheartened. Fazl-i-

Hussain had returned to the Viceroy's Executive Council, and the Party was badly in need of an able leader. A grateful Unionist Party unanimously elected Chhotu Ram as its leader. The election of a Hindu as the leader of a predominantly Muslim organization was no small honour. It was in recognition of his past meritorious services to the Party that he occupied the coveted office and his party men looked forward to taking it to still greater heights, but the high office was not a bed of roses.

The term of the present Council was to end in 1930, and during these four years Chhotu Ram was busy in giving finishing touches to the proposed agrarian reforms and bringing about a disciplined approach to the solution of internal party matters. The Unionist Party, incidentally, was not an organization of homogenous groups of people. It was a Party of nawabs and landlords who contributed a fair share of accents and troubleshooters. They wanted their say in everything of the Party, and when they did not have it, they threatened to rebel and disparage the Party leadership. During this four year period internal differences had become public and at times it seemed that the Party was on the brink of collapse. Things went out of hands when on one occasion a Unionist minister was heckled on the floor of the House by no other than his own party man. Nothing seemed to bind the Unionists together, and there were frequent frictions both in and out of the Party. For Fazl-i-Hussain, as for other sympathizers of the Party, this was most unfortunate. "Indeed, it was surprising that the Party still held together in spite of everything. This shows the tenacity with which Sir Chhotu Ram, the successor of Fazl-i-Hussain as leader of the Party, faced adverse circumstances and held together the crippled Party".

Now, Chhotu Ram appeared to be indispensable to the Party because of his remarkable organizational skill and sincere dedication to the work that had fallen to his lot. It was no less a wonder that a Hindu, and he too from the Ambala Division, should command respect and support from an almost Muslim outfit, for over two decades. Naturally, both the popularity and the following of the Party swelled beyond expectation.

Little wonder, then, if attempts began to be made by the Hindu Mahasabha leaders once more to lure him to cross the floor, with the promise of getting him elected to the office of the president of the Council. Chhotu Ram firmly turned down the offer, telling the members of this organization that he could not compromise with an avowedly communal organization. The British bureaucrats tried to wean him away by making tempting offers, but for a different cause. Sawai Brijendra Singh, Maharaja of Bharatpur, a Jat State in Rajasthan, accepted the Governor's request to have Chhotu Ram as a member of the council of ministers. On another occasion Governor Geoffrey de Montmorency, who visited Rohtak in 1927, conveyed the Viceroy's offer of the premier of Jammu and Kashmir. But both the offers were spurned because he did not deem it proper to leave the peasantry in the lurch just for the sake of an office. Those who heard Chhotu Ram declining both the offers were simply stunned; especially when income from his legal practice had dropped considerably low.

Chhotu Ram began to devote much of his time to organizing and strengthening the rural face of the Party, called Zamindar League. The *Jat Gazette* now focussed its attention

on the meaning and purpose of the League, and the founder chalked out programmes of visiting villages and towns with this end in view. Soon the Zamindar League was a household word, and began to attract large crowds at the regular meetings aimed at creating mass awareness in rural areas. The peasants listened to him with rapt attention, spellbound. Sometimes tears rolled down his cheeks when he began to narrate their innumerable sorrows and sufferings. With its epicentre at Rohtak, its tremors could evidently be experienced all over the Province. Besides the *Jat Gazette*, even the hostile Punjab Press gave a good coverage to his public lectures and press conferences. At his meetings he often dubbed the moneylender as the peasants' enemy, the black bania. A popular song at his meetings was:

*Zamindar ziada nahin to ek baat maan le,
Ek bolna le seekh, ek dushman pehchan le.*

(Zamindar, forget about all other things, but accept my one advice. Learn to speak out your mind fearlessly and identify your enemy.)

*Chaman zara siyasat mein khamoshi maut hai bulbul,
Yahan ki zindagi pabandi-e-rasmen phugan tak hai.*

(In the realm of politics (original word was mohabbat), O Bulbul, to remain silent is death. It is part of the rule of life to raise aloud one's voice.)

All this is typical of much that had been quoted by Chhotu Ram from the inspiring poems of Dr. Mohammad Iqbal, the legendary poet - philosopher of his times. All such poetic utterances had the desired effect to enthuse the peasants into action. Chhotu Ram wanted them to break the narrow

boundaries of inertia and come out fearlessly in support of their demands and against their exploitation. What he taught was the immediate need to get united and convey their grievances to the Government with loud protests. It was a common sight those days when the peasants were invariably gripped by fear psychosis in the presence of corrupt and arrogant officials. And once in the House, Chhotu Ram thundered aloud:

“Then, Sir, it was remarked that the zamindars and I are obsessed by an inferiority complex. Let me assure my honourable friends that so far as I am concerned I am a perfect stranger to an inferiority complex. And so far as the zamindars are concerned, I have during the last few years tried to create a feeling of self-consciousness and self-confidence among them to such a degree that some of my friends began to complain of the naughty manners and high-browed attitude of the zamindars, and suggested that the zamindars neither cared for the favours of the officials, nor mended their frowns and looked down upon the sahuikars”.

After deep deliberations, Chhotu Ram came out with a comprehensive five - point programme of action which was stated thus:

1. To campaign against corruption in all forms and at all levels;
2. To campaign against exploitation of the peasantry by the moneylenders and the Government;
3. To educate the masses against the false, misleading propaganda of religious fundamentalists and fanatics;

4. To organize the masses on a common economic platform, regardless of religion or caste; and
5. To ensure full representation to rural masses in Government services as well as on public bodies governed by elected representatives.

From what has preceded it should be evident that the five - point programme was essentially aimed at transforming the entire rural life into an organized, vibrant movement. It was supposed to engulf every aspect of the long neglected rural society, and ultimately result in the happiness and welfare of people at large. There could be no dearth of funds if the people could come out of their inertia which had kept them captive for ages together. With his following increasing abnormally day by day, the organization held out hopes of meeting the long cherished aspirations of the masses. Those skeptics amongst the zamindars — and their number was legion— who believed the movement to be no more than fun fare got inspired to associate themselves with it and contributed to its success liberally. The result was that the non-zamindars grew apprehensive of the possible fallout of the growing appeal and strength of the Zamindar League and started poisoning the ears of the British bureaucrats with all sorts of baseless, unfounded, mischievous propaganda.

At last the British came out to cry halt to all that was before their eyes and all that was already in their boiling minds. The immediate plan they wanted to put into action was to order arrests. A detailed note on the activities of the Zamindar League was circulated amongst the Deputy Commissioners of the Province who were asked to initiate stringent measures in case of threats to law and order. At

Ludhiana, Mahender Singh, a staunch Zamindar Leaguer and close confidant of Chhotu Ram, was taken into preventive custody, on charges of apprehension of danger to peace. Many other arrests were made. Even Lal Chand was arrested at Rohtak and he was charged with having failed to deposit a paltry sum of sixty five rupees in the Government treasury, which he had received from the auction of a ghat. But all this was symbolic and later all those who had been detained were released without bail. The village patwaris, zaildars, lamberdars were all instructed that they should keep a sharp eye on the activities of the Zamindar Leaguers and report the matter to the police in case of any possible threat to public peace and property. Every village was to have its own night watchmen and its own peace committee which was to ensure mutual understanding and goodwill amongst the various social groups. The lamberdars in villages were alerted by the police, who themselves visited the villages under their beat at night, and if something suspicious was witnessed, the matter was immediately brought to the notice of appropriate authorities.

But nothing could stop the storm when once it had started. The programme was given different names by the Government — at one time it was called socialism, at another rebellion, fascism now and lust for power later. Although the movement had not been officially outlawed or banned, attempts were made to frighten away those who sympathized with it. The peasants had come out in large numbers raising slogans in favour of Chhotu Ram and Zamindar League, and even the police bandobast seemed to be incapable of facing it.

Having waited and watched the situation, the administration decided to crush the movement through violent means. Attempts were made by some anti-zamindar elements to counter the *Jat Gazette* by a new publication, called *Haryana Gazette*. Lal Chand, who had distanced himself from the Zamindar League for some time, came out with another organization, called *Liberal League*. But behind all these innovations there was neither any leader of the stature of Chhotu Ram nor an audience that could respond to any slogan worth the name. In course of time, all plans and projects prepared to counteract the influence of the Zamindar League evaporated into nothingness.

It was not simply the cause which was dear to peasants; Chhotu Ram's charismatic personality went a long way in hypnotizing them, so much so that most peasants followed him wherever he went to speak, much like the proverbial pied piper. He was described as God-incarnate, a messiah, a living legend, a God sent protector, Chhota Ram, etc. Chhotu Ram was an extremely humble man and believed that he had a mission in life which he wanted to fulfill at all costs, here and here alone.

With Peasants' Cause in the Legislature

Rousseau, the noted French philosopher, was candid enough in exposing one of the present civilizations when he said: Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains, Man is the enemy of Man, yet the one is what the other is not. One becomes a master and the other his servant. What one is and what one is not depends upon the circumstances one happens to be placed in. If a man has nothing to live by, and the other has everything to lead a luxurious life, the two stand in an incompatible relationship: the 'have' and the haven't. It is here that the institution of slavery comes in, and it is here that exploitation comes in. If one is a labourer in a factory or workshop, it is his employer's will that shall guide him in his work and his remuneration. So also, in the case of a domestic help. And so it is in the case of a peasant who goes to a moneylender and willy-nilly agrees to the terms and conditions of his creditor. This is exploitation if these terms and conditions are unfair. It is the peasant's helplessness that binds him to be exploited.

This sort of exploitation is not a new thing in our present day civilization. Necessity is the mother of invention;

laws, rules and regulations came to be formulated as a measure to counteract the evil of exploitation. The concept of a welfare state was the outcome of those humans who waged struggles against the tyranny of exploitation. Chhotu Ram's efforts were to save peasantry from exploitation. He took up their cause in the legislature and succeeded in bringing about their freedom from economic slavery.

Times changed, and with them the peasant's fate also changed. A time came when the most prominent feature of Chhotu Ram's campaign launched for the economic emancipation of peasantry, assumed the form of a near-total sweep. Hardly had any other movement before had set in motion such a huge volume of rural population, having at its beck and call a leader who dedicated the whole of his life to a formidable task, lying in arrears for the last many decades, if not centuries. This is no empty rhetoric or idle boast, but the plain statement of historical reality, so very conveniently, consistently and callously ignored by historians and political commentators alike.

However, it was Chhotu Ram's early conviction that one could hope to reach the summit of leadership of masses only through constitutional and democratic methods. A creed of bloody revolution was, in his view, heavily loaded in favour of a fascist ideology that ran counter to all accepted norms of human dignity, freedom and faith. It was inevitable, therefore, that Chhotu Ram yearned for active participation in, and subsequent leadership of, a movement solely inspired and guided by an ethical idealism of selfless service to all sentient beings, undertaken in the spirit of fulfilling the will and command of God. Consequently, all his energies came

to the bent towards the creation of a new economic order singularly and spectacularly free from all evils of various denominations. The creation of such an order, he believed, should be the true motive of a sound political dispensation; for, as Jawahar Lal Nehru once aptly remarked, ‘politics exhausted nine-tenths of economics.’

If, then, there is any trait that stands out most prominently in the entire personality of Chhotu Ram, it is his almost exclusive or absolute concern for the weal or woe of peasantry. Whether on the floor of the House, or the public platform or his write-up for the press, he never felt tired of talking about the various issues that confronted peasantry, and of finding some lasting remedial measures. In this his contribution is unique, and remains unbeaten even to this day. Every sentence of his speech or write-up reflected his deep sense of agony and anguish, and none could cow him down. Since the cause he espoused in the Punjab Legislature was unconventional, in the initial stage he could invite only the raised eye-brows of his colleagues. His arguments on the floor of the House were logical and consistent, and the urbanities could only marvel at his political ingenuity. The image of a poor, exploited, harassed and humiliated peasant always clung to his mind, giving most of his critics the chance to have a dig at him that he had developed a mania. What we reproduce in his chapter should give us a very clear picture of the serious concern Chhotu Ram ever expressed over the peasant’s tortuous conditions of living. The points that he sought to make are intelligible easily, and we may, accordingly, add no comments of our own.

A 'Maddening Passion'

- (i) Chhotu Ram at times felt badly hurt over allegations of his opponents both in and out of the legislature that he was the 'enemy' of certain classes and was suffering from a 'mania' of talking most of the time about the welfare of zamindars alone. It was inevitable, therefore, that he should come out in defence of his position; he knew it well that all such allegations or insinuations were politically motivated and had nothing meaningful in them. It was, in his view, a bad logic to infer from his commitment to the cause of peasantry that he was the enemy of this or that class or community. He often sought to remind his critics that the cause of the peasantry was a universal concern and needed to be properly understood and attended to. If the peasants in our province are in a state of misery, is it not the bounden duty of all of us insinuations — in fact all right thinking people irrespective of class or caste — to do something to pull them out of their slavish conditions? It was Chhotu Ram's considered view that the peasants were an intelligent lot and understood much as we do, but they needed some facilities which could put them on the right track. In view of the deplorable conditions of the zamindars, as revealed by any comparison between the life of the rural people and their urban counterparts, can anyone justifiably say that nothing should be done for these poor souls, and that they be allowed to perish? The tragedy, Chhotu Ram said, was that the urban people on account of their prosperity and education were in a better position to wield so much political influence and, consequently, to bring to bear upon it so much political

pressure that, as and whenever the Government proceeds to do something for the welfare of the rural populace, they force the Government to an extent that it diverts all the funds for the benefit of these people, leaving the ruralites helplessly waiting for their turn. But, Chhotu Ram concluded, “all that we are doing and intend to do in the future to help the poor zamindars is from the purest of motives.”¹

- (ii) Chhotu Ram maintained the view that it was the foremost duty of every Government, whatever its form, to promote and protect the interests of the zamindars as a class. These zamindars — the hardy folk, as he calls them— were the only sections of our country’s population which took hard knocks with a smile. All other classes, in his view, raise an awful hue and cry at even the slight rise in taxes and prices of essential commodities. They display remarkable unity in flouting Government’s directives, and create ugly situations by blocking roads, organizing demonstrations, and, if deemed necessary, can indulge in violence. The agriculturalists, on the contrary, are a class of docile type. It does not seem possible that the shearer will find a flock of meeker sheep; but, warned Chhotu Ram, let the shearer not take away skin with the wool. The zamindar is ever ready to submit to any demand that is made upon him, without murmur or grievance. He does not kick up a row. It is he who fills the Government’s exchequer even if he happens to be penniless at the time. He may have to pay a high rate of interest, but he will never refuse payment of Government dues, like the land revenue or abiana tax.

¹ PLC., vol. xxvi, February 28, 1935

Yet, Chhotu Ram argued, the poor zamindar does not generally find himself in the good books of bureaucracy.

- (iii) Chhotu Ram often raised the point in the House that the whole world was crying for a diminution of its burdens, whether these are in the shape of interest on debts or in the shape of taxes. The income tax payer puts forward the plea that he is unable to pay the taxes because his income was speedily decreasing. The businessman comes out with his own grievances and generally puts forward the excuse that he was already running his business in loss owing to slump or for some other reasons. But, Chhotu Ram, in his usual serious mood asked if there were any such lame excuses with the zamindar. The Government officials are there to frighten him that his landholdings could be confiscated in case of default of payment. So, the poor man has to pay, of course without any show of resentment or rebellion. He deserves the sympathy of all of us, said Chhotu Ram.
- (iv) For Chhotu Ram, the zamindar is indeed a simple minded person who has not learnt the art of what he calls 'shikwa' or giving vent to his grievances publicly. It was one of his missions to awaken the zamindar to his legitimate grievances and rights as a respectable citizen of the country, but he confessed that the response to his efforts had not been encouraging. Nevertheless, he was optimistic that with the passage of time the peasant will shake his age old lethargy and understand in what direction his good lies. It is, indeed, remarkable that Chhotu Ram kept himself busy with all that could be of help in his mission. His public speeches, his speeches

on the floor of the House and his writings in newspapers, especially in the *Jat Gazette*, all combined to pull the zamindars out of their pessimism.

- (v) As leader of the Opposition, Chhotu Ram often complained that the zamindars' voice was so dim that no one cared to raise their cause in the House. What tormented his mind was the fact that the zamindar members did not stand up to bring to the notice of the Government the difficulties and hardships being faced by them. Chhotu Ram did not like that the interests of those very people should be ignored who had voted them to power. It was with this end in view that he formed a group of rural legislators, and himself gave the lead. The result was as expected. The grievances of the zamindars began to figure prominently in the speeches of these legislators and gradually the bureaucrats themselves began to realize that they had to be careful in their behaviour towards zamindars. Chhotu Ram himself undertook tours of rural areas, heard their grievances and kept his fellow legislators well informed about them. What often pained Chhotu Ram was the fact that the zamindars were not organized in any manner, had no press through which they could ventilate their grievances. Chhotu Ram often lamented: "they are so circumstanced, and to be frank, so devoid of sense and feelings of self-respect that they have to bear with a show of cheerfulness any amount of insult offered to them. They may be disgraced publicly and they may even be given shoe-beating, but they cannot raise even their little finger in protest."²

² P2C, vol. xxi, 1939

While showing his commitment to the cause of peasantry, Chhotu Ram burst out in emotion and remarked: "I have always been advocating the cause of the zamindars, whether they be Hindus, Mohammedans or Sikhs, and will continue to advocate the cause even if I am in a minority of one".³

- (vi) Reminding himself and other sympathizers of the peasants in the House, of God's grace in bringing about the enfranchisement of the long-oppressed agriculturists in order to deliver them of their incessant sufferings, Chhotu Ram struck a note of optimism that the peasant community would one day recognize its striking power and rule over the country. It is because of the dawn of a new political era that the representatives of the peasant community would fight for its legitimate interests and ensure for it a life of peace and prosperity. Chhotu Ram hoped that the Government would do well to give this community all that is its due, for it is the only community that provides not only food but also defence for the country. The Government should, therefore, bring about a change in its attitude and belief and do all that could make it strong and self-reliant.

Warning to Government

- (a) Chhotu Ram was critical of the Government for its continued *laisse faire* policy towards the zamindars and warned it to get rid of the prevalent impression that it is right if it is riding roughshod over the interests of the

³ Ibid, vol. XA (1927) P. 34

zamindars. In this context he talked of his request to the Government to abolish chahi rates and chaukidara tax, but said that he was not given a chance even for putting his case before the concerned authorities in person. Such an attitude breeds contempt for the Government and all such things do not augur well for the future. The Government has neither ears nor eyes and is, therefore, unable to hear the grievances of the zamindars nor see for itself under what pitiable conditions they are living.

The Government, Chhotu Ram continued, knows that the peasants are unorganized; they have no press; they have no platform and they are financially weak. But this does not mean that they have no grievances or that they are not conscious of them or that they are insensitive to them. Unless, Chhotu Ram warned, the Government takes effective steps to put an end to such grievances, there would be a good deal of resentment. This resentment, he further warned, might take a turn that could prove dangerous to the Government. But what Chhotu Ram doubted was if the Government awakens to such a situation.

- (b) The trouble with the Government, in Chhotu Ram's view, was that it was almost totally oblivious of the fact of existence of zamindars as an important section of rural community. No schools, no hospitals, no veterinary centres, no metalled roads, no canals, no provision for taccavi loans, no cooperative societies and no facility for rural students desirous of seeking admission in professional or technical institutions. Unless, therefore, the Government takes serious steps to attend to such

grievances of the rural people, there is bound to be great deal of resentment among them and this is certainly bad for the future of the country.

- (c) The Government, Chhotu Ram pointed out, believes that the rural people are not only illiterate but also dumbfounded. That is the reason not much attention has been paid to the grievances of peasants and other backward sections of the society. Chhotu Ram warned that sooner the Government clears itself of this misunderstanding the better. He was of the firm view that the zamindar was getting wiser day by day, and that one day he could stand up against the Government. Even in villages there is a certain section of rural population which has access to newspapers, the *Jat Gazette* being one, and keeps itself abreast of news concerning the market rates, weather bulletins, programmes and policies of the Government about rural plans. Chhotu Ram advised the Government to contrive some means or measures to lessen the burden of the zamindars, even if the relief is of a limited degree in the first instance. If somehow, he continued, the Government was unable to do so this year, they could put it off to the next year, but it would mean a year lost. The true path of wisdom, in his view, was to take early and decisive steps to grapple with the difficulties pointed out by him. It is dangerous, he pointed out, to postpone things in the fond hope of doing something in the uncertain and unpredictable future.
- (d) The debtor class, Chhotu Ram calculated, formed in the country a big population – as high a proportion as ninety percent of the whole Punjab province. Therefore,

the whole economic fabric of the country, he went on to say, depended upon the prosperity of the agricultural classes. If, then, these agricultural classes perished economically, every other section of the population must virtually be prepared to perish. The economic condition of the peasant class, he asserted, continues to be poor and if the Government remained indifferent, as it has remained in the bygone ages, only a dark and dismal future faces the country. Prevention, he warned, was better than cure. It would not be a foresight if the Government forgets about the zamindars and is suddenly reminded of them during the doomsday. Every Government, Chhotu Ram believed, must have an attitude of sympathy towards its own people.

- (e) It was Chhotu Ram, more than anybody else in Punjab, who often spoke vehemently against the judicial system introduced and operated by the British administration in India. He, therefore, always criticized it as favouring the educated urban classes more than the ignorant, uneducated zamindars. What irked Chhotu Ram most was the mentality of the judiciary as well as the complexity of laws meant to govern peasantry. It was often found that courts took a perverse view of the various issues concerning land, Chhotu Ram's point on the matter was that land in excess of the requirement of a family could not be attached and sold. This concession, he went on to add, might exist on paper, but it did not exist in practice. He cites a case in which the whole holding comprising four hundred bighas of nehri land belonging to four minor boys and five minor sisters and a widowed mother, being attached and handed over to the

decreeholder for full twenty years, in spite of the report of the tehsildar and the collector that the family had absolutely no other source of livelihood.

Chhotu Ram's objection was that handing over 440 bighas of land for a full generation, to a decreeholder and leaving eleven persons to face starvation was nothing short of cruelty to human beings. He had pleaded a number of such cases in courts while practicing in early stages of his legal career. The one thing that proved useful to him in his political life was his commitment to the poor.

Revolution Needed in All Spheres

Chhotu Ram was critical of the Government for its traditional apathy towards the peasant. On the other hand, he lamented over the peasant's ignorance. He wrote extensively about all this in his weekly, *Jat Gazette*, and often made use of poet Iqbal's poetry to enthuse his tribe and teach them to be vociferous in their grievances. The zamindar, he often spoke, must laugh out of his groove and fight the forces that were constantly chasing him to negativism. He exhorted his fraternity to take to action, give up fatalism and ensure some sort of a strong organization which could protect the interest of the zamindars effectively. In the early stages of his political career he had realized the need for 'maximum noise and speech' as a means of drawing the Government's attention to the grievances of peasantry and he was successful in doing so. He told his rural audience time and again that bureaucracy readily 'gave in' to those who could manage to bring to bear upon it maximum of

pressure, instead of persuasion. The result was astonishing. In a very short time he became the heart and soul of the peasantry and was hailed as the true leader of his beleaguered community.

The reason is now clear – that he could achieve such a measure of rapport and rehabilitation in the political world by treading a path of understanding and sympathy for his fallen tribe. He had not forgotten to remind his peasant community that they had the potential for capturing power and governing their own destinies. Nor had he forgotten to remind the bureaucrats that they were not masters but the privileged servants of the peasantry. His logic was simple and straightforward, at once close to their hearts and souls, couched in easily intelligible terms, at once such as to command their attention and assent. Indeed, no other leader before him had brought politics within the compass of popular appeal in the measure and to the extent he did. That was the open secret of his popularity, and that was how he was able to ingratiate himself into the eyes of those who were trying to discover and discern in him an element of sympathy for their poor and pitiable condition. It was Chhotu Ram's view that the economic condition of the entire business community will be seriously crippled if the peasant community remained steeped in poverty. He stressed the need upon the peasants to get united and bring into existence a strong organization. During a public meeting in 1938, Chhotu Ram exhorted his people in these words: "If you follow the path shown by me, there shall be the zamindar rule in the Punjab for ever." Actually, such loud protests and fulminations made the non-zamindar in the legislature angry and even his sworn enemy. Once Lala Duni Chand, a legislator, made a disparaging remark against

Chhotu Ram on the floor of the House. The context was a speech Chhotu Ram had made at Pai Village of Karnal District wherein it was reported that he had exhorted his rural followers to boycott the Congress and not vote for anyone except an agriculturist. Lala Duni Chand took exception to such remarks and said that he should not then vote for Mahatma Gandhi or Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Chhotu Ram came down heavily upon his opponent and said; "In this matter I do not care for you and for Mahatma Gandhi or for Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, so long as I am in power I shall do what I consider good for agriculturists. It is one of my settled convictions that normally it is only an agriculturist who can really project and safeguard the interest of agricultural classes; it is only an agriculturist who really understands the difficulties and requirements of agriculture classes."⁴

At one time on the floor of the House, Chhotu Ram specifically mentioned about the Opposition's strong demand for withdrawal of the Punjab Agricultural Produce Marketing Act and said that the question of his going back does not arise.

Peasants' Welfare Fund

The peasant in the British India presented the dreadful spectacle of an exploited, dejected and depraved person. The moneylender, his traditional creditor, was gracious enough to allow him to make his feast by living on crumbs. The bureaucrats often thought of him as a gentle lamb, to be fleeced as often or as conveniently as they wanted to, resorting to all

⁴ PLA, vol. I, 1937

sorts of coercive methods for the purpose, if occasion so warranted. Nature, with its claws proverbially red with blood, and with its traditional fury and force of hailstorms, floods, droughts, locust-swarms, earth-quakes, pestilences, etc., took away even the faintest of the smiles off his face. On most occasions the world around him looked like a house on fire, cursing neither his fate nor his God, neither confessing defeat, nor even ready to give up in frustration the battle against the moneylenders, bureaucrats and Nature. There was the land inherited from his forefathers, which the British Government claimed to be its own property. It was the sole source of keeping his body and soul together. The entire family worked on it day in and day out to eke out a living. There was no other option than a willy-nilly acquiesce in the prevailing conditions and causes, animated in his inscrutable faith that better days would come and would be accompanied by the sweet fruit of his labour.

It is not that the Government was absolutely negligent about the peasantry and the various allied issues. Commissions had been set up on various aspects of Indian agriculture, famines, credit facilities, banking, prices, etc. But the formulated policies and programmes did not produce their corresponding results. No follow-up action, no accountability. More often than not, those voluminous reports remained in the shelves of the overworked bureaucrats, gathering dust and never made public in most cases. Despite the good intention of some bureaucrats, who meant business and were conscientious in their work, the condition of peasantry improved only marginally. Things remained as static or stationary as before with little appreciable change.

What was, then, being done in the name of peasantry was only a tip of the iceberg. In Punjab it was Chhotu Ram who, singlehanded, was grappling with all those issues that had confronted peasantry for the last many decades. The various agrarian laws and the consequent rationalization of many taxes and levies, as for example, landrevenue, abiana, malikana, led the Punjab peasants to rally around Chhotu Ram as their messiah, their leader. The peasant's movements in the Punjab served to stimulate the interest of many kisan leaders in the adjoining states of Rajasthan, U.P., and Madhya Pradesh.

Aims and Objects of the Fund

“The last item to which I will refer is the peasants' Welfare Fund. There are about ninety lakhs of rupees in this fund. The first deposit in this fund was made only last year about this time, and a second deposit of sixty lakhs has been made this year. It is true that we have so far not been able to evolve concrete schemes according to which this money is to be spent. But if honourable members of the House will remember, I invited them about this time last year to make suggestions, constructive suggestions, about the manner in which this money should be spent. I again repeat my invitation. If honourable members will kindly send their suggestions of useful schemes which can be adopted for the good of smaller landowners, Government will be sincerely thankful. If they are unable to find time for this matter I propose, after the budget session is over, to call a few members for discussion. After that I expect that, by next autumn, we shall be in possession of a scheme

under which this money will be spent. But the governing principle under which this money will be spent will be that, as much benefit of this fund as possible, should go to those who are small landowners. There may be certain schemes under which incidentally the benefit of this scheme may go even to other landowners, bigger landowners but our aim will be to give the benefit of the bulk of this fund to smaller owners. Tentative schemes, which have occurred to me so far are: firstly, relief to small landowners in time of scarcity. Suppose crops fail on account of scarcity of rain or they are destroyed by floods. Then the income from this fund will come handy in order to grant relief to the people, particularly the smaller owners. At present the tendency of the subordinate revenue officials is to underestimate the damage which has been done to crops; because they are afraid of somebody higher up that, if the Government's treasury remains empty, they will be taken to task. But when you got money in a special fund, you can make use of the proceeds of that fund for the purpose of giving relief in times of misfortune, and the subordinate officials will cease to think that somebody higher up may possibly twist their tails if recoveries of land revenue are not made in time”.

Rai Bahadur Lala Gopal Das: “So, the Government purposes to spend money for the amelioration of peasants out of the income or the return from this fund.”

Minister of Revenue (Chhotu Ram): “Not necessarily from the return. The income from this fund, as also part of the fund itself; if necessary, will be utilized for the purpose.”

Chhotu Ram pointed out that the second object on

which we desire to devote this fund is the provision of a reasonable cheap credit. "As everybody will recognize, after the passing of debt legislation, the ordinary sahuakar, if he is wise at all, will not advance money to agriculturists, and in order to meet the requirement of credit for the agriculturists this fund will be drawn upon to such an extent as may be necessary".

The third object was the financing of cooperative marketing. The produce of the small landowner in particular does not fetch the price it ought to. If there are cooperative commission shops of some other agency which will advance money to meet the requirement of zamindars in the beginning of the harvest season and sell their produce at a time when better price can be expected, it could be of immense good to them. Again, their requirement can also be purchased on a cooperative basis. In many cases, the poor man from the countryside is unable to make his purchases at a reasonable price. For instance, take the case of iron. Implements made of iron are needed by every zamindar. If he has to pay eight annas, under the cooperative management, he can buy his requirement for four annas. This is another of the objects on which funds could be spent.

Then again, there were many districts: for instance, Rawalpindi, Jhelum, Campbelpur, Hoshiarpur, Ambala and even Gurgaon where erosion has done immense damage to our soil. In order to reclaim the soil already eroded and to safeguard it against further erosion, we can draw upon this fund.

The fifth object on which this fund could be spent was for the encouragement of cottage and rural industries. Great emphasis is being laid everywhere that in some way

or the other, the income of an ordinary, poor agriculturist should be increased. One of the best means of increasing his income was to provide cottage and rural industries by which he may be able to earn something more. At present even if he turns out anything at home he cannot take it to the market, because he will have to spend more time and money on going to town and coming back than will be justified by what he will get for articles produced by him.

If some arrangement could be made to introduce cottage industries in the countryside and a system under which whatever was produced by the villagers is taken up by some body and conveyed to the bazaar for sale, then it will do a great deal of good to them.

The last item is that the proceeds of this fund could be employed for creating a very large number of scholarships for those students who are intelligent but are unable to proceed to higher studies on account of their economic weakness. We know and have come across a large number of students who are exceptionally intelligent, but are so poor that they cannot take advantage of university education. If a large number of scholarships was made available in every tehsil or every district or every division, we could easily imagine the good that will be done to the sons of poor agriculturists by means of this fund.

These were six tentative objects which were spelt out on which the income from this fund or even part of the fund could be spent according to actual requirement.

The Peasants' Welfare Fund was, in effect, the practical shape of the Landrevenue Committee's

recommendations, which was constituted in 1938 by the Punjab Government.

Much thought was given as to the aims and objects of the Peasants' Welfare Fund. It took about 5 years for this scheme to crystallize and find acceptance at the hands of the Government in 1942-43. The initial contribution of Rs.30 lakhs was to be augmented every year. It was anticipated that the fund was to receive Rs. 10 lakhs a year out of the land revenue receipts from small holders, and will mostly be spent on rural development projects or things of that sort. Chhotu Ram publicly pledged that this fund will be used essentially for helping the small peasant proprietors in times of scarcity. The entire scheme was the brainchild of Chhotu Ram, and it was a great boon to the rural people. He was unanimously chosen as the Chairman of the Committee of 14 members which decided on the utilization of this fund.

A Pakistani Nobel Laureate's Tribute

While explaining the aims and objects of the Peasants' Welfare Fund, it was noted that it was one of the chief functions of this scheme to help the intelligent students of rural areas in prosecuting their further studies. One of the beneficiaries of this fund was a Muslim boy who became one of the best known scientists of the world. A news item to this effect appeared in the 14th August 1995 issue of the *Dawn*, one of the leading newspapers of Pakistan.

We reproduce the report *ad verbatim* here.

“Chhotu Ram's very big help.

“Besides many other philanthropic activities, Sir Chhotu Ram had also instituted the Peasants’ Welfare Fund out of which scholarships were awarded to the children of small farmers who paid Rs. 25 or less as annual land-revenue. Among the beneficiaries was none other than Dr. Abus Salam, the Pakistani Nobel Laureate.”

His brother Abdul Hamid wrote in the *Dawn*, “Not many people know that my elder brother, Dr. Abdus Salam, became one of the greatest scientists of the present century and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1979, because of the prayer of his elders and Sir Chhotu Ram’s Peasants’ Welfare Fund, from which he was given a scholarship of Rs.550 per month for higher studies at Cambridge. In 1946, Rs.550 was a great deal of money.

“After having done his Master’s in 1946 (First Class First from the University of Punjab) Dr. Salam wanted to go abroad for further studies.

“But his father did not have the means to send him abroad. The father’s name was Chaudhary Mohammad Hussian, who was at that time working in the office of the divisional inspector of schools, Multan. He knew about the Peasants’ Welfare Fund which was lying unutilized. He applied (as a small farmer) for a scholarship for his son for three years.

“Abdus Salam then joined St, John’s College in Cambridge (October, 1946), and got his Master’s in applied mathematics in 1948 (again First Class First) and became the first Pakistani Wrangler – people who do Master’s first class first are called Wranglers. Salam had done his Master’s in two years, but his scholarship was for three. On the advice

of his spiritual mentor, he decided to stay on and did another Master's, this time in Physics."

Abdul Hamid concludes, "By dint of hard work, Salam completed the two-year course in one and topped the list of successful candidates. This laid the foundation for his doctorate in Physics and for further research in the field of elementary particles which ultimately won him the Nobel Prize. Had Sir Chhotu Ram not created the Peasants' Welfare Fund, Abdus Salam would not have risen to such heights and won the laurels that he did. I rise to honour Sir Chhotu Ram's memory."

The Bureaucratic *Faux Pas*

Soon after entering the Council in 1923 Chhotu Ram undertook tours of far fetched rural areas to acquaint himself with the grievances of the zamindars, and sought to have them redressed with the help of concerned authorities. These grievances centred mainly around two points: the dispute over ownership or possession of land between two or more parties, and discrimination against the zamindar candidates in various technical institutions and Government jobs. After Chhotu Ram targeted the bureaucrats for indulging in various corrupt practices and collected as many as seventeen articles written by him for the *Jat Gazette* in the form of a booklet. In these articles written under the caption 'Thaggi Bazar ki sair' taking every bureaucrat to task for the malpractices committed by him or her in his or her official capacity. While the bureaucrats reacted sharply along the expected lines, the peasants were much impressed by the truth contained in them.

In this chapter we intend to cite some very interesting cases of malpractices which Chhotu Ram himself investigated and brought them to the notice of the members in the legislature.

Violation of the Land Alienation Act

On one occasion Chhotu Ram wanted the members to take note of the cases of violation of the Punjab Alienation of Land Act, committed by the bureaucrats with various powers and functions. As leader of the Communist Party in the House he thought it particularly necessary to point out that the Act should not be allowed to be encroached upon with impunity, especially during the prevalent period of depression. Chhotu Ram asserted that he had read in newspapers about a large number of alienations which had been freely and frequently allowed by the concerned Deputy Commissioner. These were violations, said Chhotu Ram, which were in contravention of the spirit of the Punjab Land Alienation Act. He made special mention of cases of violation in Gujarat. He was frank in saying that he had no details about such violations which took place in the district and which were allowed by the concerned district authorities under their special powers. Chhotu Ram said he was able to recall the Deputy Commissioner or allegations which requested to undertake special inquiry into such allegations which were received against such class of alienations. He confessed that he did not know what the results were. Nevertheless, it was found that violation of the Act had been seriously committed in some cases. Chhotu Ram stated that he had come across such violations committed in districts like Attock and Mianwali. Chhotu Ram asserted that the newspaper reports should have been probed, but nothing more could be said with certainty. One could safely infer, however, that all such reports were not altogether false or fabricated.

Chhotu Ram was able to quote one instance relating to Hissar which, in his view, was based on facts. Here also

it was a blatant case of violation of the Land Alienation Act. A zamindar was persuaded by his creditor to make an application to the collector that he should be allowed to sell his 440 bighas of agricultural land to his creditor. That application was referred to the tehsildar for inquiry. The tehsildar made an inquiry and reported that no circumstances justifying the alienation existed and, therefore, he would not recommend that permission be granted for sale. The revenue assistant supported the recommendation of the tehsildar. Consequently, the collector refused permission. After some time the same application was repeated by the same man. Again the tehsildar and the revenue assistant were ordered to make an inquiry. After some time they repeated their old recommendation that permission should not be granted. Nothing had happened in the interval to show that there was any justification for permission to be granted for sale. Consequently, the collector refused permission. After three or four months, when the tehsildar and the revenue assistant, who were both agriculturists, happened to be transferred from the district, the zamindar was persuaded again by his creditor to make a fresh application. As usual, the collector referred the application to the tehsildar and the revenue assistant, who were both non-agriculturists this time. They recommended that the sale be allowed and the sale, accordingly, was allowed — a sale in respect of 440 bighas of land. Chhotu Ram himself undertook the study of the transaction because of its repercussions in future. He said that he had absolutely no doubt in his mind that it was not a case in which any collector, if he had taken a dispassionate view of the matter, would allow a sale or would give permission under his special power for the sale of an

agriculturist's land. One of the grounds urged by the tehsildar and the revenue assistant was that the concerned zamindar owed a debt of three or four thousand rupees to some creditors. Chhotu Ram asked himself, "Is there any zamindar now who does not owe a debt to any creditor? I do not think there are even five percent zamindars in the province who are free from debt in these days of depression. If the land of a zamindar were allowed to be sold on the ground that he owed a debt to some creditor, then you might be called upon to permit the sale of three fourths of the land belonging to the zamindars. It was not a sale of a few bighas required for charitable purposes or required for industrial purposes for which the collector could give permission, but it was a request for the sale of as much as 440 bighas."

Caught at Last

Chhotu Ram cited another case as much interesting as the above one. It was Chhotu Ram's considered view that some times it was the consideration not of efficiency but the consideration of the order of the boss that makes a subordinate officer give up the accepted norm or ideal. Some times it is the consideration of loaves and fishes that makes an officer succumb to the sensual temptation. Chhotu Ram himself admitted at different times that he had encountered officers who were not honest, mostly in the case of selection of some one from an agriculturist's family. His contention was that there were often no considerations of efficiency or honesty entering into the minds of those charged with making fair selections. And he cited an instance from his actual experience.

In 1929, a Hindu zamindar applied for the post of a sub-assistant surgeon. The Inspector General of Hospitals rejected his application. The ground of rejection was that he had taken five years for passing a course of four years. Chhotu Ram stated that he was not the Minister of Medical Department, but held the Agriculture portfolio. Knowing well about Chhotu Ram's pro-agriculturist inclination, the young aspirant went to seek his help at Lahore. Chhotu Ram told him in clear terms that he had nothing to do with such posts for which he was an applicant. The posts for which the candidate had applied were in the category of subordinate ranks and he could not speak to anyone. The candidate told Chhotu Ram that he was very poor, so poor that he had no money to pay for fare back home. Chhotu Ram was deeply moved by the condition of the applicant and agreed to speak to the concerned Inspector General. Chhotu Ram told the Inspector General in the room behind the Hon'ble President's chair that if in accordance with the spirit of the resolution of 1919 he could appoint the young man on the principle that, among men of equal qualifications preference should be given to a zamindar, he should very much like that the candidate be appointed. The Inspector General's reply was: "Sir, I go strictly by the rule of efficiency. I remember the case of this boy, he had made an application before, but as he had passed a four year's course in five years his application had been rejected, and, therefore, I cannot reconsider my decision, Chhotu Ram heard him patiently and did not want to say anything further.

On the same day when the Council session was over, the boy came to Chhotu Ram to enquire if he had interceded on his behalf. Needless to say, the boy was very much hopeful

for a positive response. He could not possibly believe that, if a Minister spoke to a head of the department, he would fail in getting his appointment. Chhotu Ram repeated to the boy all that had transpired in his chat with the concerned officer. It was on Chhotu Ram's insistence that the boy promised to give him an instance in which a person, who had passed the four year's course in five years, had obtained an appointment. Chhotu Ram told the boy that, if he could supply him with the requisite information, he could easily succeed in getting him the desired appointment. Chhotu Ram believed that there could be instances of the type required. The boy was able to gather the information and was asked by Chhotu Ram to prepare a list of all names falling under the desired category. He was able to prepare a list of twenty-nine persons who had taken varying number of years from four and a half years to eight years in passing the four years course and had yet obtained appointments. Chhotu Ram forwarded a copy of the list to Fazl-i-Hussain for his personal perusal. As a matter of fact, the consolidated statement was the result of the joint action which they took in consequence of the stubborn attitude of the Inspector General. However, before Fazl-i-Hussain could initiate an action he went to the Government of India, and surprisingly enough his portfolio was transferred to Chhotu Ram. This was a chance for Chhotu Ram to rectify the mistake, if any. He immediately wrote a note that the list should be immediately scrutinized and if the facts were found to be true, nothing should be done to revise the system of recruitment. Chhotu Ram further directed that the result of the inquiry should be placed before the permanent Minister. Chhotu Ram held charge of the Medical portfolio for a short term, and Abdul Qadir was appointed to succeed Fazl-i-Hussain. With sudden changes in the

administrative setup, Chhotu Ram's note was soon consigned to the wastepaper basket. No notice was taken of it and no inquiry was made in this connection. However, the appointment of Fazl-i-Hussain as Revenue Member led to Chhotu Ram's holding the old charge once again. It was in January 1926. Soon after taking over as Minister of the Medical portfolio, Chhotu Ram called for the report of the inquiry. No notice was taken of that requisition either. The Inspector General probably believed that he was there only for a fortnight or so. After about three weeks, however, Chhotu Ram happened to be transferred to the Education department which also comprised the department of Medicine. Quite prepared for a final result, he sent an order to the Inspector General, asking him to furnish the result of the enquiry within a week. Now he presented himself before the new Minister, Chhotu Ram, all apology and said in the subdued tone that the relevant papers had been mislaid by some clerk. Chhotu Ram persistently asked him to proceed afresh. The poor officer was in a fix and said that it might take some two months to make the inquiry *de novo*. Not willing to let the officer with a guilty conscience escape so easily, Chhotu Ram retorted. "I can do the thing in two days. Take up the list of the candidates concerned and just send a letter to the Principal of the Medical College and ask him to give you the year of their admission as also the year of their passing the examination. This can be done easily." The officer said that he would do as asked to; he did it, and after about two weeks he returned with papers and said, "sir, people who had taken 6,7,8 years for clearing a four year's course had been appointed, but expressed his regrets by adding that all was done under orders of the Minister". Chhotu Ram did not

want to end up with loose ends and asked what orders were there. He replied that the orders were there so long as Mohammadan candidates were available, no Hindu, no non-Muslim candidate was to be appointed. Chhotu Ram thereupon asked him to produce those orders. The officer must have made a diligent search no doubt, but the order was not forthcoming. He said “May be that there was an oral order”. Chhotu Ram shot back by retorting that his reply was evasive—perhaps a mere fabrication. In his reply to Chhotu Ram’s question as to whether he had himself gone through the list, the shaky officer’s reply was “Yes”. Again the question was if he knew how many Hindus and Muslims there were in the list. The tenor of Chhotu Ram’s question made him feel, perhaps for the first time, that there was something basically wrong with the list and that his replies were not based on facts. And it was so. “You will be surprised to know”, Chhotu Ram concluded, “that out of 29 men 22 were Hindus and only 7 Muslims”.

Bechara Zamindar : The Distressed Peasant

Sir Chhotu Ram wrote a series of articles to awaken the peasant community. These had a magical impact, and the community was all fired up as a result. The country witnessed the rise of many activists and front-runners from among the peasants during the later phase of freedom struggle. We are reproducing here a specific series, published in *Jat Gazette*.

While in Rome do as the Romans do, is a wellknown saying. And, if 'act according to the exigencies of times' is made a part of this saying, the addition will not sound absurd, because even if there is no such saying as such, it is equally true like the first saying. Both these sayings have, however, the potency to serve as guidelines for human conduct in the work-a-day world. It is imperative for every individual as well as for every community to see to it that they do not remain unaffected by the spirits of times and the opportunities. Nevertheless, the peasant community of our population is a victim of ignorance, and that is why it stumbles upon every step and suffers losses. With a view to familiarizing the peasants with the pitfalls and results of such ignorance, I had contributed a number of articles, titled 'Bechara Zamindar', to the Urdu Weekly, *Jat Gazette*, published from Rohtak. After the completion of this series, I also wrote a number of articles under different captions.

All these articles were liked by the peasants, and on their insistence I allowed these articles to be published in one lot. All these articles are now presented to the readers in a booklet form, under the heading “Bechara Zamindar”. Presumably, the readers will like to gain a glimpse of details of all those features of the present times of which the peasantry, in my view, is ignorant. I seek here to offer an exposition thereof.

All around in the world today, the Western civilization has gained an upper hand, and even India finds itself influenced by it. Movement and commotion, revolution and efficiency are the obvious and accepted aspects thereof. It is characterized by desires, wishes and ambitions. Class interests and collective action constitute its main springs. But the peasant is blissfully unaware of all this. He is deeply attached to the old traditions of his tribe. Tranquility, acquiescence, acceptance and joys count, in his view, as noble qualities. He is conditioned by his old dispositions and looks upon activism and organization as his shackles. That explains why both his conduct and intellect have been enveloped in a climate of foolhardiness. The world is engrossed in action, while he is slumbering in a state of self-forgetfulness, and perhaps fondly believes it to be his good.

Furthermore, the peasant community is vitiated by two more flaws that hamper the process of political organization and economic progress. One of these is religion, especially the twisted forms of it, which the fundamentalists can easily exploit to degrade them. The other is the sheer deficiency of discriminating between the friend and the foe, as a result of which he is unable to identify as to who are his

and who are not. Nay, even experience teaches that the peasant cares for those who are not his and is ready for a showdown with those that are his.

However, the aim behind all that has been written is to shake the peasant free from his age-old slumber, diagnose his prevalent apathy and bring into sharp focus all those shortcomings that obstruct the process of class identity and corporate living. If, then, by writing these articles or having them published in a booklet form some useful purpose could be served, I shall deem my labours amply rewarded.

Attention : Change yourself

The present age is one of progress, of science, of education, and also one of arts or letters. It is an age of expression and writing, of organization as well. But there is the peasant woefully ignorant of the specialties of this age, he is like an old, discarded water-pot, and is deluded into thinking that people around him cannot be so thoughtless as to click him as a useless, dirty non-entity. What an ignorant being he is! It is common observation that, after extracting the juice of a lemon, its skin is thrown away at such a safe distance that the person concerned does not run the risk of being slipped. My dear brother, my respectable peasant, you have not learnt any lesson even after seeing all this. Ah, what sort of a person I am! What sort of query am I raising? It is a conspicuous quality of the peasant that he does not pay heed even to all that he sees. He lacks the power of discernment. His eyesight extends only to things like his well or his village-pond. He may stumble a hundred times, yet will not be mindful of the roadblocks. It is in this that lies the peculiarity of the peasant.

What after all is a peasant? He is the reminder of an old tradition, a remnant of an old culture. We have inventions like ships, trains, telegraphs, aeroplanes. All these scientific inventions have annihilated the distances of places and times. The weapons of mass destruction have demonstrated their efficacy in both skies and seas, but for all this the peasant is not willing to change his postures.

Times have changed, and so have the governments, circumstances and even the neighbours changed. And if there is anyone who has not changed, it is no other than the peasant himself -with the same old plough, the same cart, the same persian-wheel and crusher, the same spade and the same scrapper. Friends and relations, well-wishers and sympathizers repeat, even *ad-nauseam*, 'Please stir up; it is the time for one to be up and doing; it is the time for movement, for advancement, and though the whole world moves, yet Gul Mohammad, the peasant, does not move at all. Perhaps, Gul Mohammad is obsessed with the conviction that 'the essentials of civilization consist neither in change nor in movement. Let the whole world change, but anything like change is against my dignity.'

But Oh, my peasant brother, listen! Abandon this foolhardiness: I am your brother, an humble entity of your own tribe, your true well-wisher, a servant of your community. It is no wisdom to dress in muslin clothes in winter. If the world has changed, you must also change. When the conditions have changed, you must also change. When the conditions have changed, seek to bring about corresponding changes unto yourself. The age of arrow and sword is obsolete; wars are now fought with rifles, machineguns, bombs and poisonous gases. Hang your spears and swords. Arm yourself with new

weapons. If you don't, you cannot be spared. You are mad after false prestige, but you do not realize that your very existence is in jeopardy. You are a worshipper of false show, but you are not aware that the present civilization has derecognized such a thing. You are lost in your present resolve, and say with an air of indifference:

Khamoshi guftgu hi, bezubani hai zuban meri.

(silence is my speech and speechlessness is my voice)

Had it not been an era of atheism, had materialism not strangled spirituality, and had it been the reign of truthfulness, righteousness and justice, I would have congratulated you on your state of conformism. But, oh, the living embodiment of suffering, listen and scan the surroundings around. This is not the age of goodness, but of evil. Spirituality has no hold on the world's civilization. All else is enveloped in materialism. It is not 'Ram-rajya', nor is it the age of Harun Rasheed. The sun of Asian doctrine of self-realization that shone over the whole world has set in already. Now it is the sun of the Western civilization that is shining in the sky, and its heat has dried up all the springs of spirituality. Oh peasant, if you have to survive at all, you will have to modify your ways all at once. Replace your tranquility by activism; be vocal in place of speechlessness. Bury the dead past, and present yourself as an admirer of the spirit of modernity. The respected Iqbal has composed a very touching poem "Tasvir-e-dard". It seems Iqbal has portrayed your condition. I am seeking to present this poem here with some changes, with the earnest hope, however, that it produces the desired effect in you all :

*Baka ki fikr kar nadan museebat ane wali hai,
 Teri barbadiyon ke mashware hain asmanon mein,
 Zara dekh isko jo kuchh ho raha hai, hone wala hai,
 Dhara kya hai bhala ahde kohan ki dastanon mein,
 Yeh khamoshi kahan tak lajjate faryad peda kar,
 Zamin par tu ho aur teri sada ho asmanon mein,
 Na samjhega to mit jayega, ae duniya ke anndata,
 Teri to dastan tak bhi na hogi dastanon mien.*

(Concern yourself with the future, for some trouble is imminent. There is conspiracy in the skies. You must know whatever is transpiring, and what is likely to transpire. It is of no avail to brood over the dead past. What is there in remaining tight-lipped? Be vociferous. While you are on the ground, your voice must pierce through the skies. Oh the giver of food to the world, if you do not understand this, your own story will not find any place in other stories of the world).

Oh peasant, if you want to survive, and in place of a wretched life of anonymity you want a higher status, then learn the new techniques of struggle. Give up silence. Discard dumbness. See if there is any impact created by your demands. Long before you have tested the efficacy of silence, which is in no way helpful but rather harmful. For ages together you have been treading the path of dumbness, but it has not taken you to the point of your destination. The truth rather is that you have followed a wrong path all along. Now retrace your steps and change the direction. Have recourse to acrimony and protests, to prayers. Adopt the path of loud cries and

reprisals, and see how rapidly you start perceiving the top of the temple, with the consequence that the idol which you had so far been thinking to be irreligious in nature gives added strength to your religious beliefs.

Oh peasant, take care, be clever and vigilant. Those very men whom you have been maintaining are about to bring trouble at your doorsteps; yet you are all unaware. You do not know that some people plunder you by posing as religious guides, other as priests. Some there are to loot you in the garb of moneylenders through charging interest, while there are others to loot you through bribery. Some cheat you by becoming customers, while others cheat you as commission agents in the mandies. Some cheat by overcharging commission, some by under-weighting or under-measuring the produce, while there are others who cheat either by bidding for low price or by manipulating accounts or things of that sort. If you are economically sound, parasites like 'Doms', Mirasis', 'Bhats', shower upon you all praise in superlative terms and loot you thereby; but if you are poor, the moneylender will leave no stone unturned in milching you like a leech. Oh peasant, just reflect a little and find it out for yourself how you will save yourself from so many exploiters. Not by silence or dumbness, but by speech; not by quietism but by activism, not by brooding but by acting, not by weakness but by steadfastness, not by helplessness but protestations. Now you must wake up-from your deep sleep, look around and arise, wash your face, take to action and pick up movement as your weapon. Jump into the fray, and inflict a crushing defeat upon your enemies.

This is the Reality

I wish I could convince the bureaucrats residing on Shimla Hills as also the urbanites strolling leisurely on cool roads, beautiful parks and gardens of Lahore that a section of our population is such as looks towards others for its bare bread. Although this section produces luxury goods for consumption by the bureaucrats and the urbanites alike, the producers themselves are contented in the state of poverty and privation. The poor peasant is not secure and is in despair at heart. His helplessness is such that even in matters like paying taxes he faces difficulties. Very few people indeed are in the know of his helplessness. Recently, our Government had issued a questionnaire addressed to the district authorities. One of the questions asked was: "Have all the resources of the peasant actually dried up?" What a tiny, ignorant government of ours, which even does not know that all the economic springs of the peasant's life have withered away. True, but how shall all this be known: Every thing is on paper only. All notings and compliances are on paper only, and this is what satisfies the Government machinery. It is no body's business to enquire whether the public is satisfied or not. The bureaucrats know only about entries made on paper. How the public takes it, whether the people are prosperous or poor, is what only the village folk know? Even the patwari knows, but he is afraid of speaking the truth. As you go higher up the hierarchy, the knowledge of things continues to progressively decrease. By the time the position comes to be acquired in big government offices, it is the statistics and calculations on paper that are to be relied upon. In fact, it is exceedingly difficult for the bureaucrats to reach upto realities. The senior officers are busy in attending to

police reports and tale-bearers. Much of their time is consumed in studying political situations as also in dispatching reports relating thereto. Undertaking tours in the area, meeting the public, gathering accurate information, and seeing every thing with their own eyes, all this leaves no time for them.

And now a look at the misfortunes of the peasants. There are automobiles now, and no officer has any use for the horse. Mostly, the officers start from the district headquarters by motor cars, and driving it at a speed of 40 or 50 miles per hour reach the farthest end of the district in no time, and return to the headquarters by the same evening. If the officers somehow miss their tennis one evening their recreation has lost all. How can they digest their meals if they do not play bridge at night? As a consequence, with the disappearance of the horse, tours to areas not connected with metalled roads were abandoned. The broad objectives of tours also disappeared as a corollary of the show of motor cars, besides tennis and bridge.

Barring the solitary figure of the deputy commissioner, no other officer has felt any responsibility towards the welfare of the public at large. All the officers are affected by inter-departmental rivalry. The superintendent of police fondly believes that, if there is a decrease in the number of crimes and the agitationists have been suppressed, he has fulfilled all his obligations towards the public. The irrigation officials think that, if they somehow could recover double the usual irrigation dues, they have done their duty. The officials of the public works department think that, if the roads and the government buildings are in good condition and the contractors' palms have been greased, there is scarcely

anything left to be done for the general public. If the civil surgeon has visited one or two dispensaries, signed some official documents, and has taken a casual- look at the verandas and the rooms of indoor patients, he believes his day's work is over. And if he has performed a post-mortem examination, it is deemed to be a great favour to the district as well as the public. Take for instance the case of any responsible officer of any department; he has no love for the public, has no sympathy for public welfare, nor has he any liking for something called justice. Apart from performing the ritual of some formal obligations of his department, he does not believe that there are other duties devolving upon him for the discharge of the general good of the public. And whatever work they have to do is done as if they are mercenaries. The pitiable deputy commissioner is, of course, an exception, but he does not receive willing cooperation from the district officials. Incidentally, he happens to be superintendent of the local club, and some officers manage to grab some of his time for discussion under the pretext of playing tennis and bridge. He devotes some time to judicial work. Besides, he has to dispose of an unmanageable heap of routine, useless, and at times even absurd official papers by just affixing his signatures thereon; and whatever little time is salvaged after doing all this, is consumed by those aspiring after official recognition, or by the flatterers or tale-bearers. Those with independent views rarely call on the deputy commissioner. Some deputy commissioners consider it below their dignity to talk to such people. Under such circumstances, the fate of the peasants passes on into the hands of patwaris and other revenue officials. Whatever right or wrong they do from fear of the officialdom, the deputy commissioner confirms by affixing his seal together with his signatures.

The moment any such report receives confirmation from the deputy commissioner's signature it comes to acquire an authority of its own, much the same way as the mandate of the 'Koran' or of the Vedas, and thereafter no one can change or challenge it. Who can realize the condition of the peasant who puts up with the scorching heat of June or July months, does the weeding in sugarcane, bajra and jowar crops during the rainy season, soaks his feet in ice-cold water while taking out water through hand-operated 'dolies' from the canals during the months of December and January, waters his fields by using his well or persian-wheel? Who can know all this? Who cares to know all this? If anybody dares to speak for himself, the bureaucrats and urbanites "dub him as half-mad. People, who are habitual takers of bed-tea, breakfast at half-past nine in the morning, lunch at 1 p.m., tea at four-thirty in the evening and dinner at night cannot imagine what it all means to be hungry. And then their meals include eggs, butter, bread, tea, coffee, sweets, meat, fresh and dry fruits, aerated water (like soda-lemon) and wine that seduces the mind and renders them hilarious. How can those, living under such conditions, ever believe that the peasant lives on mere crumbs?

The poor peasant may not have been to Shimla, but some must have been to Lahore in the pursuit of their suits. The glamour of the shops at the Anarkali bazar, the lively clutter of people, double-storeyed flats at the Mall, the captivating cinema halls and coffee houses at the Macleod Road, costly ladies' jewellery, their beautiful dresses, make-up of their faces, stylish decoration of their hair, electric neonlights, fans and even the well-designed motor-cars must have dazzled the peasant's eyes so much that, for a while,

he may have lost consciousness of the fact that there are any poor people in the world. The sound of the metallic rupee-coins, excess of wealth-display, abundance of luxury goods must be reminding him of the great accumulated wealth of the legendary king of Baghdad, Karo. With scenes of the places of Lahore described above fresh before his eyes, the bewildered peasant must have been reminded of his penury on the occurrence of a thought to buy something. The town-dwellers, the urban journalists and the bureaucrats in the government, amidst the dazzling environs of wealth, shall rarely realize that it is the peasant who can scarcely afford clothes to wrap up his body, and the crumbs of the bread to fill his belly.

Oh the peasant, only God is your protector. Whenever you refer to your poverty, the government treats it as though you are indulging in a bluff. There is no newspaper to strengthen your case; but newspapers there are to condemn the laws of lands and their protection in your favour. Your whole community is enjoying deep slumber, like Kumbhkaran. Your family is divided. If some one tries to wake up this simple-headed community, the religious priests of Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus are all upset. The moment these people see some signs of awakening, they the enemies of religion, start nefarious propaganda to poison the peasant's mind, all in the name of religion:

Hopes Belied

Whenever the sky became cloudy and promised rainfall, the peasant picked up his spade and took the way to his fields. The peasant quite knows that, if the breach in

his field was not mended, rainy water would overflow its banks. After rains, he sows, the crop germinates and grows in varying sizes. Taking the crops as good, he feels that he could thereby lighten the debt burden of the moneylender, and if all went well, would be in a position to marry off his young daughter.

One day the peasant had just sat on the raised front of his house for enjoying hukka-puffs after storing a headload of green fodder in the cattle-shed when he saw the changing face of the sky. On close scrutiny he found it was a locust-swarm. He was simply dazed. "Oh God, what should I do now?" The locusts drew nearer and nearer. There was the grinding noise in the sky. Lo! the locusts are there on trees, roofs and the earth. First they came in one, then in twos. afterwards in swarms of tens to twenties. In a few moments everything took on the yellowish shape. The peasant sat gasping. What of the repayment of loans? What of daughter's marriage? He was in despair as to how to recover the cost of the seed sown. Man is the crown of God's entire creation; he plans and proposes many schemes, but God disposes them all, demonstrating his limitations. The locusts came, laid eggs out of which insects came measuring five inches in length to finish up the whole lot of crops.

Finding no chances of repayment of his debt, the moneylender filed a suit in the court. The peasant petitioned in the court for allowing payment in instalments, but was turned down. Unable to go in for appeal, a decree was issued, followed by both attachment and arrest in default. The poor peasant was in a fix and did not know what to do, what to say, and to whom? Father of nine minor children, with the eldest girl twelve years old, he cast a loving glance at his

wife, heaved a deep sigh and accompanied the attachment official.

The peasant's wife, overcome with agony and weeping profusely, cried out, "Oh moneylender, may your sons die". The peasant tried to console his wife, and also apologized to the moneylender, saying "Sir, she does not have any sense, you should not mind her words. Your money will be repaid in full even if I may have to sell my bones." The moneylender, feeling elated in the presence of the attachment official, retorted: "Chaudhary, your bones will not fetch anything in return; think of selling your daughter, Bharpai. She is all grown up now, and will fetch a good price." On hearing this, the peasant's eyes became red, and was almost mad with rage. He jumped over the moneylender like a hawk on a sparrow, caught him by the neck, lifted him up over his head, and threw him on the ground. There was a stone peeping out of the ground, breaking the moneylender's head as a result of which he became unconscious and soon collapsed. The matter was reported to the police, and the peasant was sent behind the bars. He was awarded seven years' rigorous imprisonment. The peasant filed an appeal against the judgment. The relations of the peasant also petitioned for revision of the case, but the high court dismissed the appeal petition, and the peasant was awarded the punishment for deportation for life. The peasant died three months after the high court judgment. The original decree-holder died, the debtor-peasant was also gone to the other world, but the proceedings of the decree of three thousand seven hundred rupees went on. The peasant had three hundred bighas of irrigated land. The heirs of the moneylender now applied for temporary possession of the entire land. All relevant papers

were sent to the collector. In collusion with the patwari and other local officials, the moneylender got such a plan prepared that the entire income from the land will not match up with the amount for which decree had been issued for the next twenty years. The tehsildar certified that the deceased peasant's family, consisting of his widow, four minor boys and five minor girls, had no other source for maintenance. The collector ruled that, setting aside one-fourth of the land (75 bigbas of land), the rest can be passed on in fulfillment of the decree for twenty years.

Thereupon, the case file shifted to the civil court. The case was heard by the senior sub-judge. The peasant's widow also attended. The decree holder pleaded his inability to accept less land, as that did not meet his full claim. Hence he argued that he could not be forced for compliance. The widow had got a petition drafted by a petition-writer. She stood in wonderment and nobody asked her any question. At long last the senior sub-judge delivered his judgment in the case.

Judge Old lady (Mai), your petition is turned down. Your entire land will be passed on to the decree holder for 20 years.

Widow Sir, where shall my children go?

Judge I don't know where they shall go.

Widow Sir, you are a judge; look at both sides. Don't side with one party.

Judge Mai, all this is a matter of law. I am helpless.

Widow Sir, the law is for the protection of the subjects, not for their destruction. What is this law that deprives us of our ancestral land?

Judge Look Mai, I have explained it, and now you will go.

Widow Sir, what have you explained? I could not make out anything, Where shall I take my children? What's this government? My entire 300 bighas of land has been passed on to the money-lender. Now my children will be on the roads as beggars. You are an administrator of justice, and you too must be having your own children. What will you feel when a similar treatment is meted out to you?

Judge Peon, turn this lady out of the room.

Widow Alright I go, but how do you do justice? What sort of a justice have you done? Perhaps you are also a bania (moneylender).

Saying this, the peasant's widow left the court in murmurs. But the old lady was right. Now there is no regard for justice. Now the work is either pushed aside or the spirit of the law is killed and the emphasis is on the letter thereof. To the poor peasant there was darkness all around. The police officer tortures him, zaildar punctures him; the moneylender fleeces him; while the government loots him. Go to a court, and there is justice in name. If he approaches the officers, he is given false assurances. The times are not favourable; the government is not helpful. But, Oh peasant, you are ignorant of the worldly justice! Listen to me: God helps those who help themselves. Oh peasant, ignorant of the changes of time, have you not heard that the government has no eyes, it has only ears? What measures have you initiated to take your tales of woe to the ears of the government?

Crisis after Crisis

Is there anything in the world that deserves more respect, sympathy and blessings than the peasant? He is trustworthy and noblest by nature. His earnings are honest, his nature is good. He is generous. Everybody shares his earnings. Whenever he stretches his hand, it is for giving out, not for taking in. But even then he is unhappy. He is the first casualty in any natural catastrophe; he is the first target of any government's wrath. The neighbours try their looting hand on him. See, a tiny soul of the peasant, confronted with thousands of enemies. He is in a vicious circle. At one time it is drought, at another excessive rainfall that troubles him. Some times he suffers because of low water flow in the canal; sometimes he is confronted with floods in the rivers. Some times he suffers because of hail-storm, and sometimes he suffers because of fog and frost. Some times the heat of the sun blights his crops; some times the crops are attacked by 'roli' insects in the absence of adequate sunshine. Sometimes the rats destroy his crops, some times the jackals and the hares damage them. He goes out to sell his produce, the fall in prices causes him loss; and when he has to buy, he has to pay much higher price. Over and above these natural and non-natural catastrophes to which the peasant continues to fall a prey off and on and which we have alluded to above, there are some other problems caused by men in authority and the laws enacted by them. These problems have been causing special sufferings for the peasant. Of these the first relates to the government's demand for land revenue and the second is concerned with the mode of execution of the decree in favour of the moneylender. The harsh methods adopted by the government for the recovery of revenue are too well-known to be described. The rules for

the recovery of revenue are so harsh that their very existence is enough for the purpose, and the government need not do anything more. The peasant is quite unacquainted with the grave consequences of default in payment, and that is the reason why he arranges for payment in time, by ensuring money for the payment from any quarter or source whatsoever. If all this does not work, he pays the revenue by selling food grains, fodder, cattle and articles like ornaments. He mortgages land, if necessary. So long as the moneylender continues to advance loans, he arranges them, and in case of necessity explores other avenues as well. He sounds his friends and relations, and obtains maximum help from them by referring to his family's honour. So long as he can secure help from any of these quarters he would never say that there was no earning from the produce of his lands. To cap it all, the money minded government is convinced that the peasant is not too poor to pay the government revenues. But the fact is that the hapless peasant is approaching a state of total collapse, but one wonders as to how he is still holding on.

The inquiry is still going on as to determine the economic condition of the peasantry. But if the government has not been able to find the genesis of the disease, how shall it cure it? However, by the time the government is convinced that the peasant suffers from a malady which needs to be cured, he will be making a demand for coffin.

*Ta taryak az Iraq avarada shabad,
Mar gajidah marda shabad.*

(The man, bitten by a snake, should die by the time the medicine meant for counteracting the poison reaches from Iraq).

It is possible that the government might be thinking that it is never too late to mend its ways, but such an assumption on the part of the government is deadly poison for the peasant. The other problem that troubles the peasant is the mode of the execution of a decree. There is very little output from agriculture, so that the peasant cannot feed his family, nor can he repay the debt of the moneylender. Also, the debt has assumed greater proportions. The value of the original debt amount has increased three to four times, The debt which could be paid off earlier by the sale of a hundred maunds of wheat, would now need a sale of not less than four hundred maunds of wheat. Earlier, the peasant could settle a debt of fifteen hundred rupees by selling hundred maunds of cotton, but today he can repay only four or five hundred rupees by selling the same quantity thereof. Thus looked at, one rupee of debt has now become a debt of three or four rupees. The moneylender seeks the decree and its execution. The courts are ready to blindly issue the decrees and the warrants for arrest. Even the peasant's articles, which enjoy exemption under section 60 of the I.P. C., are secured with great difficulty. If there is a widow who cannot herself do farming, her house is attached. It is for this reason that she cannot be recognized as a peasant, nor avail herself of the benefits under section 60. And if there are two houses, the court rules that one only is sufficient. Consequently, the other house cannot be exempted from attachment; and if there is only one house, the argument is advanced that it is too big for the debtor's requirements. So, the half portion is attached and put to auction. The household effects, such as the hand-operated grinding stones, utensils, cots, rough linen, carpets, etc., are seldom exempted from attachment. The

standing crops are also attached, without at the same time any arrangement for their protection and harvesting being ensured.

The supporters of the decree-holders could argue that the amount decreed has somehow to be realized. The law provides for all the above procedures, why then there should be objection against legal provisions and processes? The first thing is: what is the law? All this depends upon the interpretation by the courts, and there is a dearth of the supporters of the peasants in the courts. Secondly, the courts enjoy a lot of discretion which they often use in favour of the decree-holders. Thirdly, over and above the law, there is something like time. If in the present times of hardships peasantry is rendered homeless, it could pose a serious threat to the peace of the entire country. And lastly, over and above the manmade laws, there is the divine law which enjoins compassion and sympathy in such times. So I request the divine government, the human government and the moneylenders not to destroy the peasant, the servant and helper of the society at large.

Land-ownership

When I started this series, I intended to conclude it with four articles. But I was assured that these articles have received wide publicity where peasants abound in population in particular, as also where there is an element of sympathy for peasantry in general. Hence some friends have desired that I should add to this series two or three articles. Accordingly, I now pay attention towards meeting this desire.

Innumerable are the woes of peasantry, serious in their very nature. Of necessity: then, the stories of these woes are fairly long. It is, then, not difficult to add two to four articles in this series. It is a matter of considerable satisfaction to me that the peasants have ultimately evinced interest in listening to their woes; otherwise they seemed to be so badly maddened that they could hardly return to their senses.

What a peculiar figure the peasant is ! He is the hero of a great tragic event, but is never happy in narrating his woes to others; he is not given to making complaints about his grievances; nor is he ready to give his reactions. Our government believes that the peasant is happy, comfortable and prosperous. He would certainly have cried had he been confronted with some grievance. There are other sections of subjects who would raise hue and cry on feeling even a little discomfort. The government does listen to them. The truth is that whoever raises his voice aloud is heard. But the peasant's own attitude to his own complaints and grievances is rather strange. He considers it below his dignity to give vent to his woes. But to infer from all this that there are no grievances of the peasant is indeed a great folly. What is a peasant when viewed in a true perspective? He signifies a picture of sorrow, pain, problems and miseries. He is overtaken by worldly worries and sorrows. But his wounds and woes have no outlet. The day the peasant starts speaking, the earth will begin to shake from sheer agony of the peasant, the planets will start trembling, while the sky will begin to produce an unprecedented, awe-inspiring commotion. The government which is now in deep slumber because of ignorance will find its sleep disturbed. The flatterers, parasites, dull-headed, and the delinquents, who keep the

government in the dark, will be fully exposed as intriguers, cheats, hedonists and evil-doers.

Peasant brothers, hold your breath and listen. I am going to narrate the tale of your woes. Those who profess to be well-wishers of peasantry should also lend their ears to my tale and listen with silence, affection and attention. Let me first find out from where I should begin it. With your permission I may begin it with that in virtue of which a peasant is called a peasant -viz, land and its ownership. Many peasants don't even know what precisely is the peasant's legal relationship in this province, and even in India, with their lands. We designate ourselves as owners, landlords and landed aristocrats. But have the peasants ever cared to know why, when they want to dig out sand-stones from the village common lands or even from their own holdings, they are required to seek permission beforehand from the revenue department of the state. On the contrary, if a contractor wants to do so, he can do so from the lands of any of us after obtaining permission from the revenue department. He is under no obligation to seek our permission. Why? Because the government claims that it is the real owner, and the people who are called "zamindars" are either tenants or subsidiary zamindars of a big landlord. That is to say, peasants enjoy some limited ownership rights, with reservation of free proprietary rights by the state itself. This absurd concept of ownership is the basic cause of all our problems concerning land and issues related to it. The peasants have the right over land so long as they faithfully comply with conditionalities like payment of land revenue. Yet they are not the absolute and unconditional owners of their

landholdings. The minerals like sand and stones constitute the property of the government much like the land, simply because the government has not abjured its right to minerals along with the land right.

Naturally, the government cannot eject the peasants so long as they continue to pay the settled land revenue. Though the government has given the peasants the right of possession of land, it has reserved the right of ownership of land, and with it of minerals as well for itself. Hence there is no need for any permission from the peasants.

Strictly speaking, the problem of land ownership explained above is the root-cause of most of the troubles of the peasant. The government's claim is all illegal. The government says that the nature of land ownership was as such during the reign of Hindu kings as well as during that of the Muslim rulers. And, as the Muslim emperors took over administration from the Hindu rulers, and subsequently the British rulers took over from the Muslim rulers, so the British rulers enjoy all the rights that were enjoyed by the Hindu and the Muslim rulers. But the above contention of the British government is baseless, for the Hindu and Muslim emperors never contended that they were the real owners of the land, and that the land rights have been given by them to the peasants. Hence the government's claim is not sustainable both in terms of principles and the law. I have seen the case-histories of several villages of Rohtak district prepared by government officials. It is written in the history of each village that a particular community inhabited the village, but later it was ousted by another community which became the custodian of the entire village land. Besides; however, concepts like king and kingdom, empire and emperor, officer and

administration originated much after the creation of land and the peasantry. According to the Hindu view, the institution of governance came into existence during the times of the fourth Manu after millions of years of the creation of the world. Thus, the view that the peasant's ownership right has been given by the government is absolutely preposterous. And even if we assume it to be correct, the British Government asserts, on the contrary, that the early ages, when the Hindus and the Muslims were the rulers in this country, were really dark ages bereft of any civilization, and it was, therefore, the British that introduced civilization and polity. What, then, is the justification, it is contended, for perpetuating the customs of the dark ages on the poor peasantry while many old traditions and customs of uncivilized ages have been done away with? So also, it is argued, the so-called concept of land ownership of the dark ages should be abolished as reminiscent of the ancient practice of exploitation and injustice. After all, which of the political and legal practices in these days of civilization and enlightenment could justify such stupid land laws?

Let us move a little forward. The burden of taxation imposed on the peasant is beyond his means; the taxes are not based on any principles whatsoever. It is also a fact that no government, foreign or Indian, democratic or undemocratic, can do without taxation. Also, bureaucracy cannot continue for long without money and that is why every government has to impose taxes. Now, there are two simple principles of taxation: One, that, keeping in view the needs of administration, minimum amount of taxation should be imposed; two, that the incidence of taxation should be distributed equitably according to the capacity to bear it. At

present every Indian believes that the British government is overtaxing him. The first principle enunciated above is not relevant to the present times. The second principle is directly relevant to my article. So, I will be concerned with this only. While distributing the tax burden the British government has violated the second principle, with disastrous effects on the peasantry. The truth is that, while imposing taxes the British government has done injustice to the entire peasant community. Even if we look at the problem from the viewpoint of each individual peasant, it is evident that injustice had been done. There is no profession or vocation wherein a part of its income has not been excluded from the tax. Till last year the income below Rs.2,000 was exempted from tax, while this year it has been reduced to Rs.1,000. This much income has been taken to be indispensable for the maintenance of a family. This has been exempted as the minimum that may fill the belly of the family. It is indeed regrettable that no part of the peasant's income is exempted. His entire holding is fully taxed; his food is also taxed. Our government seems to fondly believe that the peasant does not get hungry, and that his family can live merely on air. Possibly, the government thinks the peasantry to be the loyal and un-harmful section of its subjects, and it is not necessary, therefore, to exempt it from taxation. Even if his belly is cut, he will not complain. All this notwithstanding, however, the fact is that the exemptions available to moneylenders, dealers, traders, mill owners, pleaders, doctors, engineers, shopkeepers and government servants are not allowed to peasantry.

It may be of interest to you to know as to why such injustice is being perpetrated on the peasant alone, and what

does the government say about all this? The government's reaction to this issue is the same as has been stated before viz. the contention that the real owner of the land is no other than the government itself, while the peasant is only a tenant. The land revenue is not a tax, but a rent. The cultivator has to pay the rental for whatever portion of the land he takes. The rent is never waived off. If a cultivator believes that he is made to pay excessive rent, the way out is for him: he can give up the land. No demands will exist from the government's side.

Just see how cynical is this argument. The land which came into existence hundreds of thousands of years before the government came to exist. it being subjected to taxation by it, and the peasant, who had existed hundreds of thousands of years before the emergence of government, is being treated as a tenant by our government. The land which was acquired by our forebears by means of acts of valour or chivalry is being declared as the property of the government. Funny as it may sound, the peasant is told that, if he is to rid himself of the rent, he should get himself dispossessed of the land. The peasants' plea, on the contrary, is that the land is very much theirs and their forebears. Their contention is that land has not been given to them by any ruler or emperor, and even the British government. Hence the burden of taxation is unjust and is violative of principles. Rather, we need to be protected against injustice. But the peasant's voice is in wilderness.

The peasants will, furthermore, be surprised to know that all that I have said above is being said not only by the government but also by our brethren who are never tired of

professing sympathy with the peasantry on public platforms and in the press. This subject has also been hotly debated in the Punjab Council on many occasions. Even the most revered of the members of the Hindu Mahasabha Party have dittoed the arguments advanced by the government. In their view, the rent of the land is as good as the rent of a shop; bigger the shop, higher the rent, smaller the shop, lower the rent. If a shopkeeper does not pay the rent he is ejected outright. The fact is that it is the fault neither of the government nor of our non-agriculturist brethren. It is the latter's fear that, if the burden of taxation is reduced in the case of peasantry, it might be passed on to them; as such, they side with the government just to ward off any additional tax burden on them. The peasants are virtually to blame for all this. Why are they weak? It is a sin to be weak in the realm of politics. In our Haryana there is an apt saying: "The wife of a weakling is the 'bhabhi' of every body." She is treated accordingly. O peasant! you mistake yourself for a jackal, while you are in yourself a lion. Don't lose sight of your real greatness and real traits. Don't abandon your pristine glory. Return to the reality of your being. You need not fear then anybody.

*Farigh aj andesha agyar sho,
kuvvate khwabide bedar shoo*

(You are a dormant force. Wake up, open your eyes, get up and see how you apprehend danger from others).

Tax Burden

The peasant says that he is the subject of the government. He has no objection to his paying the government revenue. He is ever ready to contribute his share of taxation,

but insists that the tax should be determined in terms of the same principle and basis which apply to other tax-payers as well. However, the government insists on a different criterion, since the peasant is looked upon as a mere tenant on the land which the government claims to be its property.

The non-agriculturist's logic is that whatever the government says is absolutely true, and is a matter of principle. Evidently, a man who occupies 2 shops has to pay the rent. The peasant retorts: money-minded government, excuse me for my being bold to inquire of you as to how you have become the owner of the land and how we, the peasants, have been made tenants. We have been residing here for thousands of generations. During the Company's reign we were very much here. We were very much the inhabitants of this holy land when Babur came here. When Mohammad Ghaznavi and Shahabuddin Ghauri crossed the five rivers with their armies, our forefathers used to plough these lands. Anangpal. Prithviraj, Bhoj, Shaliwahan. Vikramajeet, Chandragupt, Ashok, Kauravas. Pandavas, Krishna, Ram, etc., came and went, but our forefathers were throughout the owners of land. Now, say the peasants, they are being forced into the position of tenants. The government says: "O peasant, you don't understand this, you just inquire of your fellow citizens. They will ditto what we are saying. The peasant asks his fellow citizens: "Respected brethren. what you are talking of the shops is quite a different matter. We know it that the entire material used in the building of the shop belongs to another individual, and has been put up by him. In this case, material used, wages paid, etc., are of another individual and the tenant has made no contribution of his own. How then can you compare the situation of a

tenant of a shop with that of a peasant? The land is very much ours. It is our own. We have been its owner for ever. Did you ever notice any representative, worker or nominee of the government on our lands? Be truthful: has any of your forebears, for the last seven generations, ever seen the government's any connection with our land? How do you hold the government's baseless and questionable claim to be in accordance with principles ~ just? On the other side, you and your brethren sympathize with me on public platform of the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, as also through the columns of the press.

The non-agriculturist says in reply: "Brethren, look. There is no dispute about justice or otherwise. I am a follower of a principle. This is also something practicable. If you can get some relief without any burden on me, I will not mind but if to reduce your burden the government increases my burden, this I will not accept. In that case whatever the government says is alright. The peasant avers:

"Gentleman, here there is no question of putting extra burden on others' shoulders, At least this very much lies in your mouth to say that whatever is being done to the peasant is injustice. This is what appeals to one's heart, you should agree to this."

The non-agriculturist retorts at once: "Look my brother, it is very easy to deal with a person well versed in earthly affairs; you are not a worldly-wise person. You don't understand the intricacies of worldly wisdom. Worldly wisdom is not a part of your nature. How, then, can I make you understand? If I could be hurt by my own words, how could it be taken to be a reasonable thing? If we begin to get reconciled to such things, it will not be too

long to see our ruin. You will simply tell me as to how the government will make good the loss arising out of the reduction of taxes on peasantry?" The peasant contests the point, and argues: "The government will reduce its expenditure." The non-agriculturist contends: "What if the government does not reduce the expenditure?" The peasant replies: "In that case the government will meet the deficit from elsewhere." The non-agriculturist persists: "Brother, this 'elsewhere' upsets me. I am not prepared to run any risk. This will continue to stick to me that whatever the government says about the taxation of the peasant's land is correct, the government is the owner of the land while the peasant is just the tenant of the government, like a shopkeeper".

The peasant's complaints do not end here: he enjoys no exemption on taxation and every inch of his land bears the burden of revenue. There are other grievances as well. Except land, the rates of taxation are determined on a sliding scale: that is to say, people with lower income pay tax at lower rate, and those with higher income pay at a higher rate. But for the peasants the rates are all alike. For instance, income upto one thousand of rupees is exempt from tax. On income between one thousand and two thousand rupees tax has to be at the rate of, four paise per one rupee. On income ranging from two thousand to five thousand rupees, the tax burden is six paise per rupee. What all this amounts to is that in other professions people with higher income will pay a higher rate of tax, and with lower income the rate of tax will be correspondingly less. A person getting below one thousand of rupees is not liable to be taxed. But in the case of peasantry all are treated in one way only. A person owning

five hundred acres of land and has an earning of ten thousands of rupees per annum, will have to pay two rupees per acre; and a person who owns just five acres of land and gets an earning of, say, twenty, thirty or even fifty rupees will have to pay tax at the uniform rate of two rupees per acre annually.

There is yet another point of which the peasants as also non-peasants may be unaware. Among the income tax payers, if a person earns five thousand rupees in a particular year, he pays tax on this amount, but if next year his income drops to one thousand rupees, his income is not taxable. But if in the third year his earnings come to ten thousand rupees, he will pay tax only on one thousand rupees. No body will ask him to account for the intervening second year. But the rule for the land revenue is a queer one. In a particular year in which the crops are good, the full land-revenue is recovered. But next year the crops fail completely, there is no remission; only the recovery is postponed. Suppose, however, the crops in the third year are just average or somewhat poor, the revenue of this year along with the arrears of the preceding year also will be realized. This means that, unless the revenue liability remains unpaid continually for three crop years, it cannot be written off. The revenue officials seek specially to ensure that the government dues are recovered for all the consecutive three years. The tehsildar and other revenue functionaries see to it that, despite all the difficulties of peasants in the way of payment of revenue, there should be no such thing as remission of revenue dues.

All this, they think, will be the positive and sole proof of their loyalty and sincerity to the government. As such, from sheer fear of higher authorities the patwaris very often

prepare inaccurate reports about the crops. The encouragement for this comes to the patwari directly from the tehsildar and other revenue officials directly or indirectly. In cases of permanent settlements, the peasants are not considered on individual basis in matters concerning remission or otherwise. It is the village that counts as a whole in such cases. If for some reasons beyond the peasant's control the whole family falls ill, or for any natural calamity he is not able to sow even a small stretch of land, even then considering the average produce of the village as a whole, such an unfortunate peasant will not be entitled to any remission or exemption in land revenue.

In fact, the condition of those villages where there is permanent settlement, is extremely deplorable. Suppose the total area of a village is twenty-thousand bighas, of which only five thousand bighas have been brought under the plough, and out of this ploughed area only one thousand bighas have a good crop. But the peasantry of this village will be required to pay the entire revenue for twenty thousand bighas, despite the fact that there is no crop on nineteen thousand bighas. Thus, the peasant will have to pay the full revenue dues regardless of the fact whether the land is cultivated or not, crops are good or bad.

Those people who have nothing to do with land, or who are not familiar with the revenue system in Punjab, will be surprised to know that in the villages covered under the 'biswedari' practice and not under big landlords, the liability of all the land owners is both several and joint. Suppose the village area measures ten thousand bighas, and there are four hundred landholders. These biswedars will have to pay not merely their individual dues, but also of the

other biswedars of the whole village. For instance, if a few peasants somehow do not pay their own share of revenue. their arrears could be recovered either from the remaining peasants of the village or even from a particular peasant.

The method of realizing the land revenue is also flawed. The government has the power to attach the standing crops. And even if this does not meet the whole claim, both movable and immovable-property can be attached and auctioned. The defaulter can be jailed: his land can be handed over to somebody else. The collector can bring the land under his custody, and order its auction after confiscation. Nay, even the village lambardar could be sent to jail even for default by someone in his jurisdiction. Not merely this, under the principle of collective responsibility, the above harsh measure could be initiated against each and every peasant of the village. The peasant is ever in a tight corner. Could anyone say there are other people who are subjected to such a harsh, inhuman treatment in such a progressive and civilized age? Never, never. If an income tax payer refuses to pay his dues, the government has the power to attach his movable property, but his immovable property cannot be attached -his land, house, shop, etc. But in the case of peasantry both movable and immovable property could be attached and auctioned.

What, then is a peasant? A queer being who is loaded with countless responsibilities in the contemporary world. Notwithstanding his fettered rights and claims, no body considers him worth anything. But what shall the hapless peasant do, without friends and helpers? Whether his own or strangers, no body takes any notice of him.

Flogging a Dead Horse

With what a destiny has the peasant descended in this world! All the good things of life shy away from him, and all the bad and troublesome things stick to him like a 'bhurt' or a thorn. Those who belong to his community and his country fight shy of him. His ruler is annoyed with him. It is strange that even the Lord of all lords-God almighty-is heaping all cruelties upon him time and again. There is no trouble that does not befall him. There is no sorrow that does not afflict him. The whole of his house is a veritable store house of all the troubles of the world, and his vocation is the seat of all catastrophes. For how long can I narrate the sorrow of this orphan of the world? 'Shabe kotah va kissa tulani' (Night is short and the story is long). Each of his sorrow could be the theme of several books. The seventh week is elapsing, but I have not been able to present even a rough and simple picture of the tale of his woes. Even if unwilling, I should continue this series of articles.

The methods of land revenue and their laws are such complicated matters that it is not easy for the peasant to get rid of them. If some one were to do his best to free him from the doldrums of today, it may take more than a generation to accomplish his aim. The readers must have by now realized as to how harsh are the land revenue laws, and how unjustly the peasant is being treated. There is no other tax that the government can enhance just by an executive order. For enhancement of each tax the government has to present a bill in the Legislative Council. The representatives of people have ample chance to support or oppose this bill. But the land revenue can be enhanced without any reference to the

Council. Three years ago an amendment was made in this law under which the members of the Council were provided the opportunity to offer their opinion on the settlement reports, subject to the condition that such an opinion will be only an opinion, and the government will not be bound by it. Earlier, even this right of expressing one's opinion did not exist.

The right to enhance taxes by an executive order has its pernicious effect on the public. Barring a handful of people, the peasantry is by and large illiterate 'and ignorant of worldly affairs and current events. The government surreptitiously enhances the tax, and the peasants do not even have an inkling of it. For example, about a year and half back, the inspection fee for the patwari papers was enhanced. Some time back the civil courts were asked to serve the summons by registered post, and, consequently, the cost of service of a notice was increased from four annas to five annas. Earlier, the maximum fee for summons could be up to five rupees, but now if more summons have got to be issued, the fee could be as much as fifty rupees. If it is a case of partition of joint holdings, and if one of the claimants wants separation of his share, which may not be more than ten rupees worth, he may have to pay many times more than this value. For example, if in a big village there are eight hundred joint holders, an individual claimant could be forced to pay two hundred and fifty rupees as the fee for the service of summons.

From the foregoing example it is evident how the executive orders can be detrimental to the interests of peasants, and how difficult it is to protect them against such actions. However, the peasant can be harmed in many other ways. There is the example of increase of mutation fee which can

also be increased by an executive order. By the same token, the revenue charges can also be enhanced to the limit the government desires just by an executive order. In 1924, just by a single stroke of pen the government increased revenue charges by seventy-five lakhs rupees. Where the new canals have been dug, the government can enhance the land revenue appreciably even before the expiry of the settlement period in the name of improvement levy, over and above the irrigation charges. For effecting such enhancements the government need not proceed with any such proposal in the Legislative Council. Consequently, the public representatives did not get any opportunity to object to such an action. The government enjoys unbridled powers to do what it likes to. Consider what happens when un-irrigated land is sought to be converted into irrigated one, as by digging a well. The peasant spends his own money on bricks, lime, etc. He uses his bullocks for drawing water from the well under construction and himself works very hard, but the government immediately imposes the irrigation charges. The plea is that the land belongs to it and that the peasant is only a tenant under it. Even if all this is granted, the well does not belong to the government; this has been built by the peasant by the sweat of his brow; he has spent his money. The government suddenly makes its presence felt and imposes the tax in the name of irrigated land or the digging of a new well. If a peasant raises his voice in protest it is given out that he is mentally ill. Yes, this is so. Who in this age speaks the truth? Only that person can speak frankly who is prepared to annoy government officials and the whole bureaucracy, without fear of loss. Presently, it is considered prudent not to speak frankly and annoy the government, even if his brothers' throats

are being chopped off. Take another insignificant point. A certain amount is levied on all the residents of the village on grounds of chowkidara, and the salaries of the watchmen are paid from this amount. The chowkidars do not perform any duty in the villages. They are appointed and dismissed only by the officers, and that is why they do only the service of these officers. Why then should the villagers be burdened with their salaries? They serve the government at the cost of the village community. And since 80 per cent of the burden falls on the peasants, they have a genuine grievance. It is commonly said that these chowkidars work as night guards for the village, but insofar as the Haryana region is concerned, no watchman ever performs such a duty.

When we turn our gaze towards the big cities, no watch and ward fee is charged from their inhabitants. Their security is the responsibility of the government, and whatever is spent on the security arrangements the non-agriculturists and the urbanites have not to pay a single penny. One can well ask the government: What sort of a justice is it? The government has no proper answer. In the first place, the chowkidars do not perform any watchman's-duty, and if the watch and ward is incorporated into the chowkidar's duties, there is no need for the guard duty. What have the poor villagers to do with them? They do not need any security. If they need security, they can ensure their security themselves. They are not dependent on watchmen.

Notwithstanding all these reasons, the government burdens the villagers with the salary of the watchmen under the excuse for the security of the village, while the expenditure incurred on the security of the city-dwellers is shifted on

others. There is wealth in cities, but the city-dwellers are not able to guard their wealth. They cannot move out of their houses in darkness. However, if per chance the thieves break into their houses, they start snoring loudly even if they are awake, so as to make the thief sure that the inmates of the house are in deep slumber. It is indeed much to be regretted that despite all this the government is not prepared to shift the burden of security of the city-dwellers on their own shoulders. Quite the contrary, the expenditure on security provided by the city police, chargeable from the city-dwellers, has now been taken over by the government. "What a government indeed, I am all for your sense of justice and principles." The city-dwellers get all the amenities, while the villagers can only hope for doomsday. The poor villagers lose both ways' *Moore ko mare shah madar*" (flogging the dead). It is apparent the government machinery is all occupied by the city-dwellers, who have either no sympathy for the villagers, or they do not appreciate their woes.

Dear readers! Take a general look at the taxes of the province. The annual income of the Punjab is a little less than twelve crores of rupees. Of this a sum of three crores and seventy-five lakhs is derived from land revenue, and six crores of rupees from irrigation. All this is borne wholly by peasantry. In addition, a sum of about a crore of rupees is obtained as excise duty which is also primarily borne by peasantry. About one crore of rupees comes from the sale of stamps; and those who are frequent visitors of courts know that substantial part thereof is contributed by peasantry. It shows that the peasant is heavily burdened with taxes. Barring the income-tax, there is no other tax which falls on the non-agriculturists. Such a distribution of the burden of taxation

by the British government is utterly unjust. It needs revision, but it is difficult to predict when the government will pay attention to this problem.

Many people, including senior and junior officers, have been heard saying : ‘Is the land revenue any burden at all? It is very light. It was never so light in earlier times. The peasant by nature is extravagant. Whatever debt he has to pay is not due to excessive land revenue, but due to his wasteful habits. He indulges in overspending on occasions like marriages, deaths and festivals. Besides, he is given to litigation; so, he is in debt.’ But when it is so maintained, two things are lost sight of. First, the peasant indulges in wasteful expenditure when he has good crops. He fixes marriages accordingly. He can adjust their timings. Also, he can increase or decrease his expenditure according to the exigencies of time. If he has no ready cash with him or does not get loan from anywhere, he can put off many expenses completely. Second, if the crops are good, land revenue does not become a burden for big and average landowners. But for a small peasant, whose produce can hardly sustain him, even a paisa becomes a great burden for him. There is a proverb: “In penury even an elephant is highly expensive even for a pai”. Hence, for a peasant, who is even unable to feed his family, it is very difficult to pay even a paisa per acre for his holding. Also, the money he borrows for purposes of paying the land revenue throws him into the debt-trap.

This land revenue is inevitable like death which claims its toll once it comes up. The fear of attachment, possibility of auction of land, chances of attachment of both the movable and the immovable property, possibility of the peasant’s own

arrest, the fear of even the lambardar's arrest, risk of confiscation are some of the consequences attending upon the default in payment of landrevenue. All such consequences are even more dreaded than death. The recovery of landrevenue is a must, whatever the quality of crops. The remission is an extremely rare event. And some times even if the landrevenue is postponed, it is as good as nothing, and it proves more a trouble than mercy. In un-irrigated areas almost every third year the crops are of average quality or a little better than the average, and then payment of arrears becomes the peasant's curses for getting indebted, so, it is the landrevenue which is the most potent cause of pushing him into the debt-trap. The city-dwellers and government officers conveniently laugh away these troubles of the peasant. When the city-dwellers are faced with some difficulty, they lose no time in making a mountain of a mole hill. There is hue and cry in the press, and there are long, loud speeches on the public platform. Accordingly, the government's throne starts trembling, and grave anxiety is voiced over the complaints, even if they are fanciful and unjustified. Immediate action follows. It is ironical, however, that, although the peasant is ill-fed and heavily indebted, yet no one is prepared to pay any attention to his woes.

O peasant! Have you ever pondered over the reasons for so much of our humiliation? Why are you steeped in poverty? Need I explain it? You have not realized your strength, You have not put it to use. So far you have looked upon yourself as weak and poor. Others have also thought of you as weak. Organize yourself. Unleash the channels of your strength. Rid yourself of petty-mindedness and demoralization. Then, see what happens.

*Kyon griftare tilisme hech midkari hai tu,
dekh to poshida tujh mein shaukate tufan bhi hai,*

(Why are you caught up in the captivity of magic?
Just see, you hide in yourself the force of a mighty storm).

The Neglected Villages

From whatever I have written so far on themes of my choice, the readers must have inferred that the peasant has confronted various problems for centuries together. It is all because of a peculiar sense of loyalty planted in him that he has never felt compelled to open his mouth against his oppressors. Nor has he allowed thoughts of their ungratefulness to obsess his mind. The tradition of love, characteristic of the Orient, inspires him to remain tight-lipped and keep the processes of memory intact. For him, anything like averment, complaints, submissions and prayers is not only against the norms of loyalty, but also an insult to the elementary principles of love. What an ignorant being he is! Oh the effigy of innocence! Ever since the dawn of Western civilization, things like loyalty have evaporated. Selfless love has been a relic of the past. Now the loyalty norms have been reversed. The reign of love has been shattered. Hang your books on the laws of loyalty and the path of love. New books have been published on these themes. Now read the pages of these books. After a perusal of a few pages of these books, you will see that the loud clamour, rattle or clatter have taken the place of silence. Where there was the lesson of self-denial before, here is now abundance of self-praise and self-exhibitionism.

So much, so good. But all this has shown that the peasant serves well as a beast of burden on whom the government taxes are easily loaded. The old load has been on his back. A fresh burden has to be loaded on his back at the various stages of administrative arrangement. No body bothers to think as to how much of burden this human camel can carry. Sooner or later his back is bound to break. Sooner or later he is bound to crumble.

All this relates to the burden of taxes. Now, look at the government's discerning ability of truth and justiciary in spending the money received from the taxes. Generally, the peasants live in villages, while the non-agriculturists form a substantial portion of the urban population. It will, therefore, not be wrong to say that the money expended for the town is for non-agriculturists, while the amount expended for villages is for the welfare of peasantry. If we consider expenditure from this perspective, it will have to be conceded that the small peasant is nowhere in the count. I will like to discuss this aspect of the issue in some detail. If each pie of the expenditure is taken into account, the per capita account will figure out to one rupee in the towns, and one or two paise in the villages. Of the total annual income, whereas only one rupee is spent in towns, only four to six paise are spent in the villages. That is to say, about 80 to 90 per cent of the taxes are realized from the peasantry, while the expenditure for their welfare is hardly 10 per cent. The non-agriculturists hardly pay 10 to 15 per cent as taxes, while 90 per cent of the expenditure goes to their lot. Strange! The village people bear 90 per cent of the tax burden, but the expenditure on their well-being is just 10 per cent. On the contrary, the towns share only 10 per cent of the tax burden, and enjoy the benefit of 90 per cent expenditure.

The readers may not understand my contention fully unless I explain the facts in some details. I think it proper, therefore, that I should explain the various items of expenditure in their heads. Where is the money of our province spent? It is spent on roads, colleges, schools, hospitals, public health, buildings and salaries, as also on the pension of government servants. Just consider the case of roads. How many roads are there in villages, and in what condition? Proportionately, out of 10-20 villages hardly one village will be on the road built by the district board, and probably out of fifty villages one village will be on a metalled road. The remaining will be the sandy paths, all full of knee-deep burning sand and knee-deep water in the rainy season. These are zig-zag paths. At different places there are pits or holes. By encroaching on the side tracks of land, some people make these paths narrower, with the result that the peasant's cart is smashed or his bullock's leg is broken. The womenfolk cannot traverse on these roads during rains because of mud and water. But who bothers about the woes of peasantry? The improvised roads are no better than the ordinary village paths. But there is the redeeming feature that the landowners on either side cannot make them narrower through encroachment. All other problems are the same as in the case of sandy paths. If a culvert on these roads happens to be damaged, it is not repaired for years, because these roads are not used by the cars of the commissioner or the deputy commissioner. If, fortunately, any of these officers comes to drive on these roads, or some educated person or a member of the district board who is not subordinate to the executive engineer- or the overseer reports the breach, there is the possibility of its repair. And contrary to this, look at the metropolitan cities like Lahore,

Amritsar, Rawalpindi, Sialkot, Ambala and Delhi. How wide are the roads? How well maintained these roads are. They are coal-tar coated, and are so neat and clean that even a needle lying on them is visible even from a distance of ten steps. If on the pathways leading to village or sandy district board roads, even anything as big as a yoke falls, it would be lost in the sand in hot weather and in the rainy season in water and mud.

Now about colleges and schools. In all cities there are separate schools and colleges for boys and girls. There is no necessity for any boy or girl to go out for receiving education, unattended by their guardians. Education is finished after expenses on fees and books. All urban students do not have to spend anything on boarding and lodging, and yet without transport expenses. Education is complete in one-third to one-fourth of total expenditure. They are also immune from evil habits because of the sharp eye on them by their guardians. Quite the contrary, the poor peasant has to spend three to four times more on the education of his son, while he is reluctant to send him to distant schools, for reasons of protecting their moral integrity. He has to keep his daughters illiterate for lack of even ordinary facilities.

There are very few hospitals in the villages; and wherever they are, they are mostly ill-equipped. They are without proper instruments in some cases, while they are without medicines in stock. There is no room for indoor patients. Just in name there are some facilities for health-care at a distance of five-to-ten miles, but they are no match to the facilities in the cities, such as high profile hospitals, with marble floors, glass-doors, and airy open barracks for

general ward indoor patients. Those who want to hire family wards, there are arrangements for such patients. There are also separate hospitals for men and women, with male and lady doctors as specialists. Nursing orderlies, nurses and other employees are in attendance. Fresh and costly medicines are ever available. There are dark rooms, operation theatre, X-ray clinic, attractive building, flower-beds, big barracks, sprawling green lawns, and such other ingredients of decoration which may suggest to the visitor that it is not a hospital, but it could well be one of the palaces of Wajid Ali Shah. Presuming that at certain places there is no smell of medicines, any stranger could well mistake these hospitals for the palace of a king or nawab.

If a comparison is made, however, between the money spent in towns and villages, some startling facts should come out. In the towns filtered water is supplied to the inhabitants through the underground pipes; at many places in the villages, on the other hand, the villagers drink rainy water, while in some other water has to be transported on camels from as far as five miles. And where there are wells, no arrangements exist for cleaning them, and for making water fit for drinking. Leaves and twigs fall from trees into the wells, whereby water begins to stagnate and emit foul smell. The excretion of the birds continues to fall into the wells. Often, during the rainy season in particular, water in the wells is infested with insects, but there are no arrangements for cleansing it.

There are brick pavements and metalled roads in towns. There are drains for the outlet of rainy and dirty water. But the lanes in the villages, especially during the rainy season, present the spectacle of a veritable hell. There is knee-deep

marsh in streets: The cow-dung and urines of the animals stink. Dirty water from the houses collects in pits at places and stinks. There are no drains, nor is there any alternate arrangement for the outlet of water. Close to the residential areas in villages there are heaps of sledge, and of dung-cakes. Water collects at places which produces foul smell and serves as the breeding ground for mosquitoes. Though the climate of the rural areas is considered to be health-giving, yet the conditions in the populated areas are so appalling that, if the peasant did not spend his time outside, he would have been a chronic patient and could never attain even the average age of an Indian.

Proper lighting arrangements exist in towns, big or small. Electric light is cheaper than light generated from kerosene oil. In towns there are electric fans which are cheaper in cost than those worked with human energy. There are gardens, parks used by people for walks during morning and evening. No arrangements of this sort are available in villages, however.

Some city-dwellers thoughtlessly aver, "What grievances could the villagers have about all this? We pay to the municipalities for such facilities. What obligation has peasantry or the government to claim in this?" But only an illiterate person can be misled by such an averment. In the first place, there are many amenities, such as big hospitals, government schools and colleges, that are maintained by the government, and the urbanites don't pay taxes for them. Many gardens are run against state expenditure, such as the Lawrence Road Garden in Lahore. The facilities, such as metalled roads, lighting, waterworks, drains, etc., under the

jurisdiction of municipalities and are subsidized by the state treasury to the extent of 50 to 70 percent. Hence in their construction and maintenance, for every expenditure of one-half of a rupee incurred by the urbanites, the provincial government has also to spend one-half of a rupee, and often even more.

The government also spends crores of rupees on new buildings and on the repair of old ones. As much as 95 per cent of this expenditure is incurred in cities. These buildings add to the beauty of the cities, and the city-dwellers alone benefit from them. When contracts are given, it is the city-dwellers that benefit from them in terms of profits. For the village-folk it is difficult even to get their names registered with the department, because they have no easy access to the executive engineer. All officials are non-agriculturists and urbanites. The villagers have no contacts with them, and are unfamiliar with the ways of offering baskets full of fruits and sweets. They also do not know how to do flattery. The result is that the peasant does not benefit from these highly costly buildings, neither in terms of contract, par transportation, nor even daily wages. Even the mode of expenditure is without any restraint, and in this respect can easily beat Mohammad Shah Rangila and Asif-ua-Daula. In Rohtak district alone, there are hundreds of schools which, because of lack of funds, have been in existence in village chaupals for the last twenty years. There is no fund for such primary schools, while a sum of eight lakhs of rupees is spent on the construction of a hostel in Lahore.

The peasant earns, while the non-peasant enjoys. The peasant labours, while the non-peasant finds leisure and

pleasure. The peasant is made to pay, only to be spent for the non-peasant. With naked body, bare-footed and empty stomach, the peasant earns wealth, and thereby fills the safe of the money-lender and the treasury of the government. His own kitchen is always stuffless, yet he is all indifferent. Wife hungry, children starved, himself with empty stomach. What's this phenomenon? What's this infliction? Why is the peasant in distress, and for how long will this last? This answer is all too evident. The peasant lacks foresightedness. He's dull-headed. He has fallen victim to illegitimate and excessive submissiveness and looks upon himself as every body's bonded labourer. Oh peasant! lift your gaze from the ground and turn it to the sky if you want progress and respect.

*Kiya rifte lajjat se na dil ko ashna tune,
Gujri umr pasti men misale nakshepa tune.*

(You have not familiarized yourself with the delights of summit and progress in life. Rather, you have spent the whole of your life by remaining in a state of regression, trampled under feet, like the footprints).

Discrimination

This write-up today is the ninth and the final in this series. I shall deem my labour amply rewarded if these articles create some profound impact on the peasants and wake them up. In the event of their not coming to self-consciousness, I shall attack their opaqueness with some other weapon. It has never been my creed to get frustrated, losing heart or getting pessimistic. The failure for the first time shows only

that proper attempts have not been made and that there is need for greater pains. So long as one lives, it is one's duty to make efforts and perform action. It is in the divine hands when and in what form efforts bear fruit. I know it fully well that the peasant is in a state of deep slumber, much like Kumbhkaran. I have been endeavoring to wake up the peasantry in Haryana for about twenty years and in Punjab for about six years. Sometimes I scratch under his feet, sometimes I pinch his chest, sometimes I shake him by his shoulders, sometimes I sprinkle water on his face. He opens his eyes, changes sides, jerks, but after yawning lapses into deep sleep. The matter of the fact is that, taking advantage of his deep sleep, a certain section of people has in its possession a kind of gas that makes him unconscious all at once. The moment the peasant is on the brink of gaining consciousness, this section releases the gas forthwith, with the consequence that his sleep remains undisturbed, and even becomes much profounder than before. But believing that hope sustains the world, I am here narrating the sorrowful, last part of his story.

It's the government's proud privilege to collect taxes from its subjects to run the administration. I don't object to this privilege, but along with this privilege it is the government's duty to treat all subjects alike, and never to discriminate between one section and other sections. The peasant submits to the government to provide canals for irrigating his lands, for the obvious reason that he is born in an area which has only scanty rainfall, all that too uncertain. The level of water is very low, and also water is usually brackish. His survival depends completely on canal water supply, and there seems to be no alternate way for his survival.

The government holds that it is prepared to dig out canals, but that it will not expend a single paisa till it is convinced that it would be able to recover at least the amount of interest on the total outlay. If nothing more, besides sundry charges, repair, salaries of the government employees, at least interest charges must be realized. Normally, no one can object to this contention, but if the circumstances are such that there is no other way of salvaging the peasantry, it is the duty of the government to spend money to protect and promote the interests of its peoples. How is it that no such stringent conditions are imposed on the urbanites? No guarantee is sought that, so long as there is no hope of a suitable return on capital investment, no money will be sanctioned for purposes of beautification and physical and intellectual development. Why, then, should a guarantee be required from the peasant sector? When the government opened a medical college in Lahore, was any such guarantee sought from the people that the requisite interest must be ensured on the amount spent. There is the Mayo Hospital in Lahore, Atchison Hospital and many general hospitals. Besides, there is a maternity hospital, and also a specialized dental hospital. Had the government actually demanded any such guarantee before their establishment? Never at all. Perhaps the supporters of the government might argue that the things I have mentioned above are meant for public welfare. But everyone must accept my contention as well that a canal is also for public utility. A college creates conditions for intellectual development, a hospital takes care of the health of people. But a canal is ever the necessity for the survival of a nation. Why is a guarantee for the interest money insisted upon? Survival precedes all other necessities like health and intellectual development. It is absolutely true that, when the government

makes an investment for health and intellectual development, there is no thought of realizing the interest on the investment capital. But when the matter concerning construction of a canal to save the victims of famines surface, the government unnecessarily embroils itself in the anxiety for interest charges.

The issue of state is also very important. Nowadays government service is not only a source of ensuring one's livelihood, but is taken to add to the status of the person, and everyone has equal right to have share therein. Moreover, government service is also a source of power, authority and right. The power, authority and status that go with it, provide one with a good opportunity to serve the interests of his own class as well as of his countrymen and people of his clan. Generally, it is contemptuously said by some that government service is a symbol of slavery, and those aspiring after it possess a slavish mentality. But their disdain is only a show-off. When their near and dear ones are in need of jobs, these very people are seen running after government officers, shamelessly indulging in flattery the kind of which the peasant cannot imagine.

The annual expenditure on salaries of government employees in Punjab totals up in the neighborhood of two to three crores of rupees. This is not an insignificant amount. When 80 to 85 per cent of the provincial tax revenue comes from the pockets of the peasants, there is no reason whatsoever why they should not have their rightful share in the expenditure of this two-three crore. However, barring a few particular departments, the peasant is deprived of his share in all other departments. Take the case of any branch of the public works department. It is under the charge of non-agriculturists.

Consider the statistics of the medical department. There is no place for peasantry in this department. So is the case of the education department, and equally is the position of judiciary, and so also is the case of police department. Again, the non- agriculturists enjoy a dominant position in the income tax department. The entire secretariat of the provincial government is full to the brim with non-agriculturists. So also in big cities, and offices of the bureaucrats they are in full command. Take for instance the office of any commissioner. It is in the control of the non-agriculturists. Cast a glance at any office of any deputy commissioner, you will find the non-agriculturists all-pervasive. The offices of the district sessions judge are the bee-hive for the non-agriculturists. It is as if the offices of the superintending engineer, executive. engineer, police superintendent, civil surgeon have been bequeathed to them in succession, and as if they are simply untouchables for the peasant.

In October 1919 the government had passed a resolution according to which in almost every department a certain proportion of jobs had been earmarked for peasantry. Fourteen years have elapsed since the passing of this resolution but in the implementation thereof the non-agriculturalists are erecting Sikandar-like line of resistance. The agriculturist members of the Council stress the need for its implementation in the Council, but the non-agriculturist members obstruct the process by raising questions, and presenting amendments. Twice resolutions have been passed concerning the deficiency of Hindu peasants in the appointment of sub-judges, the government being the object of condemnation. The High Court's regard for justice and ability has come in for condemnation. As the saying goes, 'we bow our heads before

the arbitrators, but there will be status quo.' If any such resolution is adopted for the non-agriculturists, the work to have been done in a decade shall be done in one year; but the work concerning the peasants to be done in five years may not be done even in fifteen years.

The members of the Governor's executive council, both the peasant ministers, all secretaries and many senior officers of several departments do express sympathy with the cause of peasantry. But their sympathy is no more than lip service; it is seldom put to practice. Some one has aptly characterized the modern state as bureaucracy. Whatever is done here, is done by the clerks.

As the offices in most cases are dominated by the non-agriculturists, the sympathy of the members of the executive council of the Governor, ministers, secretaries and heads of departments is no more than a mirage.

But all that has happened up to now is most regrettable, yet what seems to happen shall be more regrettable. In the provincial competitive examinations only those subjects are prescribed in which students of the non-agriculturists can secure better marks. Hence the Indian Civil Service abounds in non-agriculturists. In the 10 years to come, 20 out of 29 districts shall have non-agriculturist deputy commissioners, and if all this continues unabated, the share of peasantry in other services will be steadily decreasing because these very deputy commissioners will be the recommending authorities. However, if the government is interested in finding out a solution of this malady, it should either abolish the competitive examinations or, alternately, these examinations should include two or three such subjects that would bring out the

traits needed for an I.C.S. officer. For example, it will not be inappropriate to include a 10-mile walk on a pitch dark night as a subject.

So far, I have questioned the peasants on many issues. I have shed my own tears for them. I have myself adopted the path of complaints instead of quietism, but such an attitude will not work. I now seek to give them the advice given by Dr. Iqbal. Hopefully, it will work:

*Nala vo faryad vo matam takuja,
Seegna ko behay paham takuja,
Ora amal poshida majmune hayat,
Lajjme takhJeek kanune haym.*

(For how long shall this wailing serve an end? For how long is it proper to beat one's breast? The real objective of life is hidden in perseverance. The process of births and deaths is the law of life.)

It is obligatory for the peasant to become active, and he should search out a certain path carved out by a revolution in his thinking, whereby all problems are put to an end. There is only one condition that he works with full devotion and accords priority to organization over all other things. The Congress, Muslim League, Sikh League, Chief Khalsa Diwan, Hindu Sabha, are all leisurely pastimes of the urbanites. Leave them for the city-dwellers, I want to infuse a new spirit and a new life in the Zamindar League. Concentrate religion in mosques, temples and gurdwaras. Rid yourself of qazis, pandits and gyanis. Perform your namaz in mosques five times a day, and observe fasts. Give charity. Recite the Guru Granth Saheb; read Japji Saheb. Study the Gita and the Vedas.

Meditate and perform arati. But keep religion completely separate from politics. Regardless of their religious faiths, the peasants in Punjab can occupy a common platform, provided they keep themselves immune from the chloroform administered by qazis, pandits and granthis.

I want to say something to the government and the non-agriculturists. The peasant is the centre of all political and economic life in Punjab. All should cherish his progress and interests with highest esteem in their hearts. If the peasants are prosperous, all are prosperous. If the peasant has misfortunes all are wretched. If the peasant is salvaged, all are salvaged. And, if the peasant is ruined everyone is in for ruin.

Towards the end I would most humbly address the peasant in Iqbal's words:

*Mera rona nahin, rona hai yeh sare gulliishtan ka,
vag guj hun mein, khizan har gul ki, hai goya khizan meri.*

(All this is not merely my wailing, but of the whole flowery garden. I am that flower who is equally affected by the autumn.)

Travails of Peasantry

The peasant is an embodiment of ignorance for reasons of his profession, thought, action, behaviour and temperament; but look at his misfortunes; despite all his simplicity, he is tormented by all sorts of cruelties and disappointments. He has been landed in a pitiable plight by the vicissitudes of life,

the turn of a series of historical events, the laws and policies of rulers of different times, social taboos and economic programmes. The poor fellow is in a state of adversity, is caught in a vicious circle, (Where he knows neither the beginning nor the end of his travails,) puts up with atrocities, and is surrounded by calamities. The social deprivations are torturing him. He's a toy of the catastrophes of the earth and the sky; he is the laughing stock for his neighbours, and is a stranger to all government favours and all delights. He is friendly only to woes and troubles.

*Riyaje dahar men na ashnaye bazm ishrat bun,
khushi roti hai jisko, men voh mehroom musharat hun.*

(I am unfamiliar with the delights of the associations of this world. I am that unfortunate man on whose fate happiness weeps for ever.)

The peasant is silent, and he is silent to a degree where he is to all intents and purposes speechless. But notwithstanding his silence and speechlessness, every part of his body speaks out the story of his pain. He's the biggest earning son of the Indian Society, but looks out towards others even for crumbs. Articles of daily consumption, like milk, curd, butter and ghee are produced in his home. He produces things like sugar, rice, etc. Agricultural goods like wheat are grown by him which are the causes of hustle and bustle in markets and mandis. He used to produce the raw material for the Dhaka muslin and the Benaras fabrics, and even continues to do so. Who else rears the famed Nagauri bullocks? In whose stables are the Kathiawari fast-running horses born, and brought up? But he is so unhappy and frustrated in the eyes of

the world! Producer of all good things of life, he himself is a destitute, and has to beg of others.

*va ye nadani, ki tu muhtaje saki hogaya,
may bhi ill, meeDs bhi ill, saki bhi ill, mehfil bhi ill.*

(What an ignorance! You have become dependent on others. You are yourself the wine and the drinker of wine. You are yourself the wine-company. You were all, but you are none.)

All the warehouses of the entire country are filled with the food grains produced by him. The goods trains moving to-and-fro are laden with the produce of his fields. Big ships depend on him for their freight. It is the peasant, however, who is not hopeful of filling his belly even with bare dry coarse grains. He produces butter and ghee, but his poverty does not permit that his children could make these articles the ingredients of their daily meals. These poor souls can be familiar with these articles only on the occasion of some festival. He can hardly afford even the coarsest cloth for the requirement of his family. He is somehow able to pull on during the summer and the rainy seasons, but with the advent of winter an extra trouble grips him.

He cannot even dream of things like quilts and blankets. If the peasant is somehow able to get a simple quilt made from white coarse cloth for the night, a bed-cover made from worn-out linen to sleep on, and coarse khaddar sheet for covering his body during the icy days, he would consider himself fortunate enough. But how all these things for each member of his family? His children warm themselves in the mornings and evenings by means of fire. They are dependent

on the mercy of the sun during daytimes. They seek shelter in a wall and by turning their faces towards the sun to try to ward off cold. A trouble arises when it is time to go to bed. There is no adequate bedding, and hence two or three children have to share a common bed. The cots are laid in small, closed dark rooms, so that cold does not find entry from any quarter. To make good the deficiency of bed-sheets, layers of grass come in handy, and this is how they derive the vicarious pleasures of cushioned beds of the elite class.

The affluent people residing in palatial buildings cannot imagine the sufferings of peasantry. Those who have not encountered hunger, for whom a naked body is no more than a mere story, those who have no acquaintance with penury, what can they know of the peasant who is ever restless and unhappy because of trials and tribulations. Oh the rich people brought up with silver spoons in their mouths, Oh the millionaires unacquainted with the troubles. Oh the nightingales un-introduced to the autumns, the hapless, poor cultivator, ruralite, the weilder of the plough is deeply inflicted with the curse of poverty. The Id festival is no festival for him; his Shabberat is no Shabberat for him; his Dashehra is no Dashehra of delights and pleasures; it is the Dashehra of woes and sorrows. His holi is not festival of colours, but one of shedding tears. You enjoy different kinds of tasty dishes, but the peasant can hardly afford cheap brown sugar, coarse rice, and that too by mortgaging some of his utensils with the shopkeeper. You proudly move about in glamorous and shining clothes, but the peasant cannot even think of getting his rough, coarse clothes washed or coloured. The wives of the rich people are laden with ornaments of gold, while the poor

peasant, on the other hand, is trying his best to persuade his wife to take off her unseemly silver ornaments, so that he could provide his children with sweets on the eve of the festival by mortgaging them with the shopkeeper. The rich people consume soda water, tea, coffee, etc. in the fairs, but the poor peasant would consider himself fortunate and shall thank God if he could give one piece to his child to enable him to buy some cheap eatable like fried ground nuts, and satisfy himself that his child has not been deprived of something in the fair. Restlessness and anxiety continue to afflict the peasant. At one time it is the moneylender's residue, at another it is the village headman's reminder for recovery. When the moneylender is about to quit, the headman drops in; at one time he is tormented by the decree from the civil court; at another, the officials of the revenue department knock at his door. If at one time his goods and cattle are being taken away in the execution of the court-decree; at another, his house is being put to auction. If at one time his standing crops are auctioned, at another his produce is destroyed. If at one time his entire livestock is in the grip of a disease, at another, there is scanty rainfall and, sometimes there is excessive rainfall. Sometimes the crops do not mature, while at other times the entire matured crops are destroyed by hailstorms or by locusts. There is slump when there is something with him for sale; he is equally in distress when he goes to borrow money because of the rise in prices. Thus, the rates of purchase and sale of his produce are always determined by others, the result is that the poor peasant suffers in both these bargains. He is fleeced with greater torture than even a sheep. The fact is that during this entire process the skin of the peasant is so badly hurt that the wounds do not lend themselves to be easily treated.

The peasant is surrounded by unhealthy environment. His house is like a dingy lock-up, there being no provision for air and light to find any entry. He and his children live there, and the kitchen inside the house continues to emit smoke incessantly. During winter even the livestock is kept in this very house, the door closed from all sides. The foul smell of cowdung and the urine, and the foul air breathed out by men and the livestock, pollutes the whole atmosphere. During summer also, the livestock, especially the milch cattle, is kept inside the house most of the time.

No arrangements exist for the cleaning of the streets. One encounters heaps of garbage emitting foul smell at various places in the village. The children often use these streets as public lavatories; even dirty water collects therein. The condition of these streets worsens during the rainy season. To walk through such streets is as nauseating for the eyes and nose as it is for the feet.

Just outside the inhabited area there are pits or holes which emit a lot of foul smell from dirty water collected therein, and serve as the breeding ground for the mosquitoes. Close to the populated area there are muddy water reservoirs, called village- ponds. Dirty water through the drains usually falls into such ponds. The village folk often bathe themselves in these ponds, wash their clothes, wash their buffaloes and horses. This very water, besides being used for drinking is very often used for cooking meals and pulses. No efforts are made to save water from getting polluted. At various places there are garbage dumps. In some colonies there are places for tanning and dyeing of skins; one can see pits used for curing sheaves of jute. All I want to say is that outside and inside the colonies, circumstances combine to render the

environment very harmful for health. If the peasant seldom falls sick, there are two main reasons: first, that the climate in the fields is pure, and that the three -fourths of the peasant's time passes in the fields; and second, most ailments are due to some defect in the stomach because of overeating and fatty and tasty food taken in excess. However, the peasant has no access to such a diet and very often he has to face even starvation. Hence there arises no question of the peasant's developing stomach trouble. Besides, of course, the epidemics, the peasant is mostly unaffected by other ailments.

The peasant's helplessness makes its presence felt in cases of spread of malaria due to the abundance of mosquitoes during the rainy season, or in cases when a member of his family is attacked by pneumonia because of insufficient clothing, or in cases of the spread 'of epidemics. For two or three days, no notice is taken of the ailing person, but when the condition of the ailing person deteriorates to the extent that he is unable to move about or take his food; then he is taken to be sick. But generally the cure is virtually left to the mercy or goodness of God. Or, the patient is taken to some local quack available in the village, and medicine is taken from-him. If in the village there is some 'wise man', his services are also availed. The talisman's effect is never to be lightly taken. However, the right and real type of a treatment is beyond the peasant's reach. There is no hospital in the village within a radius of a mile or two. The new civilization, new age and new light are portents of troubles for him. No doctor is prepared to visit the patient without his fee. Even a doctor drawing his emoluments from the state exchequer, and flourishing on the treasury replenished by the peasant's hard-earned money, wants both fee and transport. The poor peasant

is in no position to pay the fee, and so far as the matter concerning transport goes, all that he has at his disposal is either a cart or a weak horse. The doctor considers it below his dignity to ride a cart, and he does not either know how to ride a horse. The patient is left with no other alternative than to cry in his bed.

If God is so good as to help put off death, the patient recovers; else he leaves for his heavenly abode. Some times the peasant takes the patient to the hospital in his cart. He waits there for hours together, salutes the doctor ten-twelve times, but there is the doctor who does not take any notice of him. The peasant is with dirty clothes, with little prospects of paying any fee to the doctor; but why should the high profile twentieth century, dutiful doctor pay any attention to him? However, the doctor takes special interest in a person like the police inspector, a tehsildar, a deputy superintendent of police, or any other person who is very affluent and can make his car available for him. Obviously, the doctor has little interest in looking at a poor, uncultured peasant. Ultimately, at the recommendation of the compounder, the doctor consents to examine the patient, but carelessly and disinterestedly, and while writing the prescription he is so half-hearted that the patient will dare not to come to the hospital again. Truly speaking, hundreds and thousands of villagers die of various ailments in the absence of facilities as also because of the mercilessness of the doctors.

The list of the peasant's grievances is long. His woes are unending. The unkindness of God, atrocities of the society, natural calamities, apathy of the government, stone-heartedness of the moneylender, the indifference of the

pleasure-seeking government officers, inaction of his leaders, and, ultimately, his own ignorance and foolhardiness are some of those causes that do not permit the coming to an end of his misfortunes, ruin and household ignominy. Every moment his mind, pierced by woes, continues to reach the state of discouragement. The tale of his woes is painful and a long one. But what and how I should say anything? There is none to listen to, there is none to sympathize with. No body is prepared to listen to his entreaties; no body is prepared to lend his ears to his grievance. Spontaneously, this is what comes out of one's voice:

*Is kaum ka dukhda ilahi kise sunaon,
dar hai ke is ke gam mein, ghul-ghul ke mar na jaoon.*

(Oh my Lord, to whom should I narrate the woes of this community? What I am afraid of is my death that could be slow, but painful, in this process).

The Peasant's Prayer

Oh my Lord, the Supreme Being of both the worlds, the Creator, my God, my Supreme Father, my Supreme Divine, Omnipotent, great Guru! what sins have I committed for reasons of which I am awfully surrounded by troubles? What's my fault that I ever find myself besieged by difficulties? Tell me my lapses, as a result of which the difficulties always continue to hang over the summit of my life. After all, I should know which crime I have committed which is accountable for all my woes. What fault have I committed because of which I am surrounded all the twelve months of the year in one trouble or another? Which are those

evil deeds of mine that are recoiling on me now? What's there in store for me that continues to be the cause of one sorrow after another in every moment of my life?

*Game alam fardan ast
va man yak gunche dil darant.*

(Amidst all the woes or worries of the world, it is the flower of my heart that is forlorn).

Strange! A poor peasant's tiny soul amidst the colourful cluster of woes! "In whatever direction I behold, I see enemies all around. My soul is stuck up in strange storms. Men are enemies, animals are enemies, birds are enemies, forces of nature are enemies, moneylender is enemy, government is enemy, neighbours are enemies, people of a parish are enemies, my own people are enemies, others are enemies, and if my great sin is forgiven, even God is my enemy. Where to go? Where to seek shelter for life? In whose refuge to go? And, of whom to beg refuge?

Oh my real Guru! Oh my real Lord! I am poor, yet I am sincere, and earn my livelihood with honesty; I am of good temperament, of good character and truthful. I live on my own earnings alone, and consider other's wealth as good as dust. I don't commit theft, don't take bribes, don't overcharge. I welcome the guests; I don't multiply my credit money fraudulently; don't under-weigh while giving; don't overweigh while taking; don't fleece others while charging the tax. Why, then, am I the target of all travails? There are people who commit sins brazenly, yet prosperity and happiness serve them like slaves. Others have been seen committing sins, yet they are happy. My neighbours enjoy their time under the shade of

trees, yet heaps of wealth are to be found in their houses. I work in my fields from dawn to dusk. On returning home, I remove the livestock's excretion till I go to bed. I get up early in the morning; clean the cattle-shed; feed and milk the cows and buffaloes. After taking proper care of the bullocks, I am on my way to my fields. I have to bear the brunt of scorching heat of summer months of June and July; I have also to confront the sultry weather of August and September months. I profusely perspire from head to toe. I put up with the severe cold of winter. It means that heat, cold, rain, sun, all are on my head. I am ever in motion in utter disregard of darkness, dangers of thorns, biting bharuts, venomous scorpions, snakes, etc. For all this, however, I am steadfastly devoted to my work. All this apart, I am not confident of getting even the coarsest of clothes and the poorest of the meals. As soon as I am able to discharge the moneylender's debt, the government's landrevenue becomes due for payment. What's all this? Why am I the man afflicted by such calamities? My house is the guesthouse for afflictions. Unsolicited .guests are always in possession of my house. The troubles which afflict me come in various forms and hues. Sometimes, it is scanty rainfall; sometimes it is excessive rainfall while at times I am impatient for a few drops of rains, sometimes the torrential rainfall destroys my crops.

Sometimes the rains are late in coming, and, accordingly, the sowing is delayed. Sometimes the rainfall is good and sowing is over well in time, but subsequently the crops are completely destroyed because of drought. Sometimes the matured crops, awaiting harvest, are ruined by unwanted rains; sometimes a long spell of westerly winds causes the crops to be dried up; sometimes the easterly winds blow,

resulting in the damage to the crops by insects, thereby keeping the crops without blossoming and fruiting; sometimes hailstorms ruin me; sometimes frost is the cause of damage; sometimes storms cause my six months' earning to be buried under the sand; sometimes it is the gram crop that suffers damage, and also the wheat crop does not nurture grains; sometimes the locust swarms take little time in devouring the standing crops; sometimes it is the caterpillar that devours all that is green. So much that the little mouse living in the soil proves extremely dangerous; it attacks with all its retinue so violently that both my crops and my fate lie shattered and scattered on the ground. My Lord! What to do? No alternative is in sight. Where to hide this insignificant soul? Now my enemies are surfacing from within the bosom of the earth. My enemies are born out of air, sky and water. How to protect myself against such uncontrollable enemies? Where to go?

Leave aside the forces of nature. Leave aside animals and insects. These are, as is well known, devoid of intelligence, and cannot, therefore, realize my sorrow and suffering. But take the case of man. How does he behave with me? Consider my moneylender. I am his purchased slave. I earn by the sweat of my brow, and after every six months I make my moneylender the owner of all my produce. He is very clever in his trade. He weighs my produce; he cheats me by overweighing at the rate of about four seers a maund. He calculates price at a rate lower than the prevailing market price. Whenever I have to buy something from his shop, he underweighs by giving me thirty-eight seers instead of forty. He charges a higher price than the ruling market price. I well know that I am being fleeced, but helpless. Once I allow myself into the debt-trap, it is impossible to find a way out. These

traps have found their permanent abode in my house ever since the good old days of my forebears. Interest is paid; interest on interest is paid; two-times or four-times of the principal is also paid; but the total amount of the debt in the account-book of the moneylender still exists. Oh moneylender! You are very cruel, you manage to take away all my earnings after every six months. You deprive me of clothes; my little children clamour for even small things of the world. They cannot enjoy good food even on occasions of festivals. If the sort of treatment meted out to me by you, is meted out to you, you would then realize how atrocious you have been towards me. After all, your greed should have some limit. You have realized interest many times more than the principal amount, and even this interest is still multiplying. Nothing is left with me now, except my life. Will you not like to spare even this?

It is not only the moneylender who is treating me so mercilessly; others are also there who mete out a similar treatment.. Take the case of the patwari who is my next door neighbour. My son takes his cow for grazing along with my own cattle the whole day, and he takes it back to his home in the evening. I give him chari, fodder, firewood, water, foodgrains, presents, etc., as my humble respect towards him. According to the conditions I make such gifts as a gesture of my regards for him. But when I have to seek his favour, he returns to his real nature. If he charges his rightful fee, I would not at all grudge. But he never misses the chance to extort a bribe, and he squeezes me to such an extent that it is difficult to return to my original self. My crop is wholly destroyed, not possible even to salvage one-eighth of the original. According to rules, both the irrigation charges and the land-

revenue be suspended. Regrettably, the patwari reports that the damage to the crops is about one-eighth to one-fourth; consequently, I have to pay the irrigation charges and the land-revenue to the full. I have no ready cash, and there is at the same time nothing surplus for sale with me; and even if there is something, there is no buyer. All government dues have to be paid by a certain date. You can dodge death, but not the government dues. Helplessly, I have to knock at the moneylender's door. He gives me just fifty rupees, but in his account books makes an entry of hundred rupees. All this is 'no secret', but I am helpless. I put my thumb-impression in his bahi, and with it I mortgage ever my economic freedom as well as the future earning of my sons in favour of the moneylender.

There is factional politics in the village. Someone inimically disposed towards me surreptitiously plants an old-fashioned gun in my house, and then reports to the police. The very next morning the policemen turn up to search out my house. The gun is duly recovered. Not even my deities know about this, let alone myself. But the police officer attributes this to me. He uses foul language, misbehaves, holds out threats, pressurizes and creates the fear of myself being got declared as a confirmed offender. Some such habitual offenders join the investigating officer. The village functionaries—lambardar, safedposh and zaildar—are also there. Someone among these is the police officer's agent. Accordingly, all of these advise me to rid myself of the trouble by offering some bribe. The police officer is a man of word, and shall not go back on his word. I find myself forlorn amidst so many devils. I go by their advice as a last resort. The police

officer assures me of my virtual acquittal in a court of law. Involuntarily, I make the offering to the police officer. But my household does not hold out any prospects of money. Therefore, I went to the moneylender and borrowed the money from him. The police officer knew all this, but the stone-hearted man would not take any pity on me. Oh police officer! Oh merciless officer! being educated and a responsible officer, have you not realized that you have forced an innocent family into abject slavery for generations to come. Leave aside the moneylender, for he belongs to another caste; leave aside the patwari also because he comes from a different area; leave aside the police officer also, because he is a resident of some distant place, for a government servant cannot be expected to have sympathy and love for me. But what can I do if my kinsman himself is there to strike at my roots? The cruel fellow seems to be desirous of a commendation certificate, or jagir, or rank or some squares of land or some job for his relative. Whatever be the magnitude of the damage to the crops from drought, floods, hailstorms, frost or locust swarms, this headman of the village is so much possessed of a sense of loyalty that he conceals the damage. He understates it much below the actual. However much I may be in the midst of trouble and turmoil, this underling of the government would always say; "Sir, everything is all right because of your grace and kindness." The government may be favorably inclined towards giving remission, but these selfish and opportunist people (lambardars, safedposh, zaildars) profess to be the promoters of the interests of the government beyond all proportions, when they say: "If the government give some concessions, it's its compassion and kindness, but no remission

is needed.” Now, tell me what complaint should I make? What to pray? Is ghar ko ag lag gayee ghar ke chiragh se.”

(This house has been set on fire by its own lamp)

Why entertain a grudge against strangers, when our own men show more mercilessness? Why complain when our own dear and near ones are the source of more sorrow than others?

*Man az begangan hargiz na nalam,
Ki baman harche karde an ashana karad.*

(I don't complain against others, because my own near and dear ones are perpetrating cruelty on me).

In the end, take the case of the government. My Lord, the Lord of my life and property! There is nothing to question my loyalty. There is no doubt about my loyalty. I serve as a protector during war and an earning son during peace. I fought in France, Flanders Danyal, Galipoli, Egypt, China, 'Afghanistan, Abisinia, South Africa. I did not retrace my steps wherever I went. The battlefield was red with my blood. When the war was over, I lay aside my sword and ungrudgingly took up my spade and sickle. I continue to replenish the government exchequer with wealth; but the government treats me in a characteristically indifferent and unfamiliar way. In its orthodoxy it has stuck to the time-barred revenue system, and declares that it is the owner of all land and that the peasant is bound to pay tax for every inch of the land. It has thereby taxed bread. The other's bread is exempt from tax, but mine is not. I dig a well with my own money and labour, but the government imposes chahi tax thereon. How far to explain? The government. has burdened my weak shoulders with the provincial taxes. Notwithstanding all this,

however, I have been unperturbed, without uttering a single word of complaint. But now poor yields and depression have broken my back. My children are hungry, and no more strain is bearable anyhow. But the government is still not convinced that all the limbs of my body have weakened. Things have now come to such a pass that for one reason or another I have to pray for remission at the time of every harvest. But as the proverb goes, an officer possesses only the ears, not the eyes. However, I don't have the requisite strength to reach up his ears.

Not only this. The government collects the money from me and spends it for others on hospitals, schools, colleges, roads, gardens, parks, water-supply, drainage, etc., to provide them amenities of modern times. It forgets me altogether. I get a discouraging response for jobs in various government departments. If there is a vacancy, nothing of it I know. I have no access to the recommending officers. I provide education to one child in extreme penury and when the time comes for his appointment, he is blatantly ignored, and some trader's son is appointed. The government passed a special resolution in my favour, but, barring a few departments, and because of manipulations of some people, nothing could be done to properly implement this policy. When I go to the government to complain, it takes ill of it. The government treats it as some sort of an accusation against the honesty of its officers. It may or may not be my desire to question the bona fides of an officer, but how does this innocent-looking government presume that all its officers are gods and angels?

Oh my most revered, supreme Lord, I am hapless. All around I behold only enemies; there is none to whom I could

look for help and sympathy. I feel handicapped by penury, starvation and the wounds of debt. I labour during the whole day, even then I am not sure of making my both ends meet. Say, is death not preferable to life? I am tormented most, so much tormented and frustrated that at times I start doubting your existence, compassion and justice. But even then the 'small, still voice' declares: "Don't lose heart; there may be delay in God's justice, but there is no negation of it. Rise, pick up courage and act." I bow before this voice of sanity. I have narrated all the agonies of my mind to you. I have told the woeful stories to all. I engage in action once again under your patronage. Bless me with your generosity and compassion.

A New Message

Every human being by nature is a slave of his habits and an admirer of modern ideology. But owing, partly, to some historical events, influence of his surroundings, his own ignorance and silence, and partly because of some misconceptions, the attitude of the peasant has been moulded in such a way that he finds himself incompetent to cope with the struggle of life of today. His mind has been taken over by such ideas, and it has got used to such anxieties and ideologies that he cannot carve a way to reach his goal. What is today needed is that the peasant should be extricated from the slavery of orthodox tradition, and that he should be salvaged from his old habits. So, I hereby present a new message in the service of the peasant. In point of fact, this is not a new sermon. It seeks to remind the peasant of an old precept which he has long forgotten; I am visualizing the secret of the peasant's

progress in this new sermon, or simply the renewal of the old precept and request the peasant to listen to this new sermon with rapt attention.

The Hindus have divided life into four stages. The first is the stage of brahamcharya. This is the time for acquisition of knowledge and developing one's mental and physical faculties, so that one is fully prepared for all future struggles of life. The second is the grihashthashram, which concerns the family life. On reaching this stage one is enjoined to procreate children, earn livelihood, amass wealth, be religious, and earn name and fame. The first is the stage for preparedness, while the second concerns enjoyment of mundane pleasures by making use of all his human faculties with full devotion and justice. The third is the stage called vanprasthashram. It aims at purification of the soul and acquisition of spiritual knowledge through single-minded devotion, taking abode in hills and forests, free from all worldly concerns, and making the best use of knowledge and experience gained earlier. The fourth is the stage called sanyasashram. It seeks to assimilate the qualities of the three preceding stages. It enjoins that the aspirant for perfection should shake himself absolutely free from all earthly bondage, and devote the rest of his life to the selfless service of all living beings.

The mentality which has influenced the peasant is concerned primarily with the third and fourth stages. Besides, he receives some education, flawed in some respects, from priests of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, saints and mendicants. These preachers are in themselves not so enlightened and conscious in their thinking that they could clearly explain as

to which of their sermons are concerned with the preparation of which ashram. That is to say, they cannot explain which part of their preachings is concerned with action, which with spiritual knowledge, and which with service of people. Their expositions are not relative to the requirements of the various ashrams. Mostly, they relate to the van and sanyas ashrams. Nevertheless, I want now to concentrate on that noble sermon which had been relegated to the background so far.

Oh peasant, so far you have always been taught lessons of peace and contentment. Now I want to teach you the lesson of discontentment. Both peace and contentment are the enemies of struggle. I want to see you involved in activity. All that preaches fatalism is wrong. I enjoin upon you the need to complain against fate. And, if there is any authority beyond you that seeks to undo your action, wage a fight against that also. Fight against fate, and also against the constituents of fate. If you continue to rely on fate, you can never progress. Only the person, dissatisfied and unhappy with his present conditions, can progress. A person who has compromised with fate can never entertain the thought of progress. So far, you have been given sermons of peace, but I want to make you appreciative of the qualities of discontentment. Whatever there is, in movement, activity and dynamism. Activism as characteristic of the living movement is the symbol of life. Endeavour itself is life. Inactivity is death, and to be inactive is characteristic of a dead body. Inactivity is but another name for death. Give up inactivity. Pay your homage to inactivity and abandon it. See, so long as water flows, it remains pure. Standing water stagnates. The misguided leaders have preached inactivity. I want to preach you revolution. Quietism

or inactivity reigns only on cremation- grounds. Why quietism in the realm of the living? It's only the cremation-ground that can have inactivity. The abode of humans cannot be unstirred. Oh peasant! you are alive. Shun the magic of passivity if you do not want to be equated with the dead. Be vociferous from head to toe. Produce the river-like noise from within; create tides of an ocean, imitate The lion's roaring. Protest against it and be the emperor of the jungle. To look small is a moral crime, a sin and is an insult to one's community as well. Therefore, look up, why do you fix your gaze towards the earth? Look towards the sky. Don't be like a fowl. Learn to fly high like a bird. How can you progress if you are short-sighted? How can you make progress and soar high in the sky if your gaze is towards the ground? There is no exaggeration in this, that if your feet are on earth, your gaze should be at the top of the sky. Your gaze should be penetrative.

In people's opinion you are brave. But, oh my peasant brother! I don't think so. Your valour is confined to your physical feats, and that too when you are on the battlefield, or when your stick yearns to strike your brother's head. The mere sight of a constable makes you tremble with fear, you react in a similar manner when you encounter a government employee. A gun-weilding man shakes the whole hamlet, and makes irrational demands; but no body dare raise his voice against such an unreasonable demand. It is a common occurrence in the Council that a trader opposes the government, a Khatri is relentless; an Arora is most unyielding; but a peasant, most like a lion, sticks to his seat like a jackal. At one time he beholds the gestures of the Revenue Member, at another he looks at the Finance Member, and sometimes he finds solace

in the Chief Secretary's winking. What's here indicated? This, that the peasant, though physically strong, is deficient in moral courage. Conceivably, some honourable member of the Council takes this amiss and gets annoyed; likewise, some of my near and dear ones may be angry for reason of my describing the cowardice of peasantry as a whole in somewhat exaggerated terms; but I am doing all this deliberately to remind the peasant as well as the peasant-members of Council of the need to whip them, and I myself am sharpening my whip more.

The type of education imparted to the peasant is such that it makes him inactive, He is suffering from too much of an inferiority complex. I want this inferiority complex to be replaced by a sense of pride and self-respect. I want to see the peasant as a ruler, and that is why I want to get rid of a feeling of dependence. The unnecessary concerns and unnecessary docility, besides unnecessary education, have all combined to render him timid and thoughtless; and he has created thousands of deities. Therefore, I say, Oh peasant! don't worship any other God except the Almighty one. Don't be a follower of anyone; don't be some one's slave. Be a master, not a slave. Leave slavery and be the ruler. If at all you want to be a slave, be the slave of one who is dedicated to the cause of the poor. If you want to be a servant, be the servant of one who helps the down-trodden. If you want to be a devotee be the devotee of one who is serving God, because by being the servant or slave of such people, both your soul and your self-respect are not harmed. People consider self-worship as bad; and so also my peasant-brother might be considering self-worship as undesirable, and might be thinking as to what has happened

to Chhotu Ram today? What has he started saying? But the tendency of looking towards others and of worshipping them has gripped the peasant so firmly that there is nothing that could destroy it root and branch, except, the teaching of self-respect. Invariably; then, I should express this in the words of Iqbal:

*Ghulam himlnat an khudparastam, Ki
banoor khudi band khudara.*

(Whether slave or servant, be a worshipper of yourself, because self-worship is also liked by God).

Need for New Mentality

The readers might be complaining as to why I have been dwelling on the same subject time and again. I have been writing for the last some months on peasant's problems, his painful condition, the panacea for all his ills, as well as the need for reorientation of his thinking. The readers' mind has become disinterested by reading the same facts and ideas again and again. But even then I am venturing to write on the same theme again. Generally speaking, such a course might sound absurd and even a cause for complaint. But I find myself helpless to do so. I am well aware that instinctively a man's mind craves for novelty, as also for change. Yet, I am recapitulating the old themes.

Should I explain the reason why I am doing so? I am not yet convinced that the purpose for which I have been writing these articles has been accomplished. If I arrogate to myself position of a doctor and to my readers or peasants the

position of a patient, I would say that my patients are not yet recovered.

If a patient has developed a deep wound, the doctor changes the, dressing daily after cleaning. It is possible that the patient may get tired of the bad odour of the medicine, he may also like to have his wounded hand to be kept free from dressing. But so long as the doctor is not satisfied that his patient's wound has been duly healed, he will continue to do his odd job even against the patient's desire. My position is very much alike. The full impact of my action has not been produced. Hence the reason for my writing on the same subject time and over again.

O peasant! make sure that short-sightedness, inferiority complex and couragelessness are the signs of downfall and degradation. Far-sightedness, noble thoughts and an adventurous spirit are the stepping-stones to success and achievements. You have by now been without the virtues of far-sightedness, noble thoughts and courage. That's why your identity lies shattered, you have no status, and you are receiving kicks of the world. Be far-sighted, generate noble thoughts and muster courage, and then see whether progress and prosperity lie at your feet or not, whether the sky accepts you as its guest; whether the stars in the sky look upon you as your companion or not; whether those who kick you put you in the position of their headman or not. Just make use of my prescription, and then see its effects. Consequently, those who look upon you as degraded, they will shower honour and respect on you. Those who hate you today will cherish friendship with you as a matter of pride. Those who look upon you with contempt will have no courage to raise their eyebrows in your presence.

Oh peasant! you deem yourself as good as nothing because of your self-forgetfulness. In reality, you are everything; you are a soldier of your king, you are the defender of your country; you are there to replenish the government exchequer; you grow crops to fill the godowns of the moneylenders; you are the giver of food; you are the glory of the world; you are the commotion of the courts. Yours is a commanding position in the courts, jails, markets, mandis, trains and fairs. What to say? I cannot conceive of anything which you perceive but in which your spirit does not reside, or those things that are not without you. To me, you appear to be the greatest man, as the crown of the world. Never for a moment should you think that you are no more than nothingness. Inscribe in your mind the thought you are everything. In you lies dormant the impenetrability of a mountain; in you lies sheltered the intensity of a storm, the force of floods, the flow of a river, and the light of the sun.

If you come to taste all your qualities even once, and ignite them according to your needs, the whole world will bow before you. You are the prophet and his companion, the preceptor and his student, master and the servant, the supreme and the good, the ruler and the subject. You stand ruined by your thought that you are simply nothingness. You have an excellent excuse for the whole lot of your degradation, of your roughness, your poverty, your ailments, your dirty clothes, your dirty body, your dirty dwelling, your dirty surroundings, your dirty livestock, and all your compulsions. Your excuse is: "Sir" what am I? I am just a peasant, and this is the ubiquitous condition of the community of peasants. Banish such a thinking from your mind, take it that you are something big, that you deserve greatness, that you are fit for being

worshipped. All good things of the world are at your feet. Physical health, physical strength, intellect, wealth, honour, fame, high status are meant for you. It is your right as well as your duty to acquire all these things in just and ethical ways, as well as to utilize them in the same way. Flash this through across your mind repeatedly, and let it stay there permanently. Transform this thought into faith, and then see how all these things appear before you with folded hands, like slaves.

Oh peasant! you are contented, gullible, tolerant, peace-loving, and compromising. I want to see, however, all the signs of your specialty changed. Be ambitious, not contented, take to discrimination and get rid of the sense of dependence on fate. Cultivate in your nature the quality of fastidiousness in place of your miserable nature. Say good bye to your peace-loving nature. Warm up your mind by sparks of aspirations, and be belligerent by giving up peacefulness. Contentment, peace-lovingness, humility, etc are good traits; they are also commendable in special circumstances and to a certain extent. However, when they exceed a certain definite limit, and indiscriminately become the abiding ingredients in the character of an individual or group, these very traits then become vices. Oh peasant! all such traits exist in you as vices. These very traits have rendered you timid, and the light of greatness has taken leave of you. You are opaque now. Your self-regarding sentiment is gone. Your power of determination is no more with you. Lethargy and self-diffidence have permeated your mind. The bird-like wings of your thinking have been cut. Your initiative is considerably subdued.

My message to you is that you will renounce the path of 'shanti' (peace) and take to that of 'kranti' (revolution); but this

does not mean that you will add to the number of murders and difficulties. There are techniques of revolution even during the times of peace. Practise these new methods of revolution. Fight the government constitutionally. Confront the moneylender's dishonesty and cruelty. Wage a war for your rights against those who have usurped them. Don't bow before an oppressor, confront his high handedness with a legal procedure. Don't bow before the corrupt officials, and don't give them any gift. Expose those who are liars, cheats and sinners, and put up a brave resistance against dishonesty, cruelty, bribery, and sins.

Oh peasant! you are silent, and this is what I don't like. Your silence is misconstrued. The moneylender thinks that you are unaware of his malice and harshness, while the city-dwellers believe that you are unaware of your rights having been usurped by them. The government fondly believes that you have no grievance, no trouble: that, if there had been a complaint there certainly would have been commotion somewhere. There is neither a complaint, nor a grievance, and this is indicative of the fact that neither is there.

Oh peasant! forget not that even the mother, whose love for her child is unbounded, does not feed it with her breast milk unless it starts crying. What a fool you are if you think that the government will appreciate your troubles without your wails and remove your difficulties forthwith. Remember, it's a peculiar government, most unlike the previous governments. In bygone ages, the ruler, or his lieutenant, as soon as he learnt of the grievances of his subjects, would immediately issue royal orders for redressal of those grievances. But the present government of ours is bureaucratic, meticulously following

law and procedure. Human frailties don't find any place. This government does not act unless the papers on the file are complete, but it is not quite possible unless the petty officials are duly gratified. Our government does not gear itself into activity unless all the legal procedures have been gone through and all the laws followed. But' all this requires so much patience and time that the peasant is unable to follow it. Under such circumstances he should use all those methods which have been followed by the rest of the world—those of complaints and protests. The world shouts, and you should also shout. If people rent the sky with their 'haye haye' slogans, you must also rent the sky likewise. If others will be heard, you will also be heard. Remember, however, that no hearing is possible unless you cry.

O peasant! you serve others, but you never know how to serve yourself. The Sikh League, Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha, Khilafat Movement, Muslim Conference, The Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Akali Dal, Mahabir Dal, The Chief Khalsa Diwan, Majlis Ahrar, the Congress are all there because of your existence and work because of you. You participate in their conferences in thousands; and when they come to you for raising funds, you empty your pocket there and then. But go back on their past history, and take note of their activities. Has any of them done anything for you? Do they appreciate your grievances? Do they know your ailments? Never. All these are the leisurely titbits of the urbanites, the means of their recreation and amusement. These are the tactics employed to embarrass the government, or to secure jobs for their near and dear ones. But you are mad after them. Quite the contrary, you are unmindful of the Unionist Party, or the Zamindar League. Speak out the truth:

are you a member of any branch of this Party? Have you paid subscription to this Party? How many times have you attended the meetings of the Zamindar League? The Zamindar League is a panchayat of your own community, and exists for your exclusive interests. The Zamindar League believes in soft-peddalling. It does not attach much significance to courting arrest, nor is a man who speaks from its dais, counted as great. But the whole of its programme is for your own uplift and improvement; if you want progress, enroll yourself as its worker. So far you have served others; now you pay heed to your own service.

Peasant brother! if you don't take it amiss, let me point out another deficiency in you your are timid. You lose your wits the moment some one indulges in the false report that the deputy commissioner is annoyed with the Zamindar League. If a non-agriculturist patwari says the he will send a report to the district authorities against the Zamindar League, all your faculties take leave of you. You start hiding your face in the meeting of the Zamindar League once you catch a glimpse of a constable or head-constable. You labour under the illusion of seeing a snake where there is only a rope; of seeing leopard where there is only a sheep. Are these the signs of advancement? If you want to move forward, be a warrior of the battlefield, give up lethargy, spend money, work hard, devote time, force fear out of your psyche. For

*Dile bebakra jargam rang ast,
Dile tarsindara ahu palang ast.*

(The courageous heart has the characteristic of a lion; but to a coward even a deer is mistaken for a tiger).

Activity and Ignorance as Personality Traits

O peasant! It is for you that I have waged a war against the whole world, and that's why every body is annoyed with me. Hence I have moral right to scold you, to reprimand you, and also to pinpoint your mistakes, shortcomings and deficiencies. A few days back you were asking God to tell you of your faults. I am in your neighborhood, and know the inner secrets of your family. Whether God tells or does not tell you your faults, I will tell you what your faults are. Mysterious are the ways of God, and these may not be intelligible to you. I am your brother, and converse in your language. My speech could well be intelligible to you. Get ready, come to listen attentively. Ignorance has penneated your mind.

This ignorance, tamogun, has possessed both your heart and your mind. It is tamogun that has eaten up all your traits or has overpowered them so much that they are not visible to any body. This preponderance of tamogun is the cause of your destruction. Just reflect a little how you have cast the whole of your lot on others. Even for a little you have to beg of others. The burden of debt has overtaken you because of your ignorance; it has increased manifold. Now you say that you cannot pay it off, and pray to the government to enact such a law that there is automatic redemption of your debt, that increase in interest ends or at least it is reduced, and that you are not jailed for default in the execution of the decree and also that your property is not auctioned. In what way can you help the government even if it wants to do something? The moneylenders and their supporters. will raise hue and cry, condemning the proposed enactment as unjust and

oppressive. But what 'you on your own can do? Nothing. No stirring out of your house, no making use of your tongue. Perhaps you want that some one would prepare some liquid or eatable and put it into your mouth; prepare 'halwa' and put it in your mouth, finding its place in your stomach and entailing no labour on your part .. You want the landrevenue and irrigation charges to be permanently reduced, and you get remission each year when there is failure of crops. But the government cannot ensure money like the showers of rain from the sky; it cannot bring money from London for carrying on administration; Also, you don't suggest additional resources for augmentation of government's income. If, however, the government proposes to levy a new tax on the non-agriculturist sector, there will be hue and cry both in the press and on the platforms. Your impotency is of little use to the government. Even if a tax is proposed to be levied on the betal-leaf and soda water, your representatives become tight-lipped. All these things are simply luxuries and of little use. Any tax on them should be welcomed. It should lead to government's income, and its burden would normally be on the urbanites, especially the affluent sections. It's possible that this tax, or for that matter other taxes of this kind, will lessen your own tax-burden. But no; your representatives side with their urban counterparts on this issue. If there is any cut motion proposal, these representatives favour the government.

What to do under such circumstances? You are simply naught: you are impotent. The friends cannot count on your help, nor is the foe afraid of you. You are lame, a hault, an orphan. All the springs of your life are dried up. Your organism has lost vitality, your intellect cannot think, your ideas lack wings, your mouth has lost voice, your eyes have lost sight,

your ears have lost audibility; who says you are alive? You are lifeless; nay, even more than the dead. You are liability on earth; one wonders if the grave shall gladly accept your corpse.

Having been compelled by such circumstances and fed up with wretched life, there is this wailing that possibly some body would hear it and get ready to help you—that God bless you, government pities you, some neighbour's heart weeps for you, or even that, O peasant, your original nature comes to be resurrected. I don't intend to blame the moneylender, the government, the urbanite or the non-agriculturist. Any complaint against them is irrelevant. All these are working according to the dictates of their nature.

A man of an average status is not voluntarily prepared to give up his privileges, no matter if this gain he obtains by harming the interest of others. Every government chooses the path of least resistance. Every government seeks to keep away from the path that invites opposition and controversy. It's not every man's cup of tea to help you in your path, for it's beset with difficulties which you on your own cannot surmount; it's full of thorns, and in no way are you competent to remove them, or desirous of seeking help to do so. The real aim of all my wailing is to infuse life in you, so that your lifeless existence comes to a dead end, you stand on your own feet, and you become an ideal for your friends and a dreadful sight for your enemies. Make the way for the government whereby it could help you and sow the seeds of justice in the hearts of moneylenders. Multiply the sources of your income so that you manage to walk out of the debt trap, and the chances of your suffering such ignominies lessen in future.

Just reflect a little why you got into such a condition. At the very outset of this series of my articles, I had amply made it clear that it is all due to your folly. God has given you plenty of rajogun. So long as these rajoguns remained in your mind with full force, you ruled over the world. Your downfall was inevitable when the rajoguns in their vitality were subdued by tamoguns. Your degradation is quite in accordance with the laws of nature. Nature itself is a force, and it helps those in whom power and life reside. How shall nature help when you have lost your power? Give up tamogun and seek refuge in rajogun, and then see how nature renders you all possible help. O peasant remember, activity is power, activity is life, activity is novelty and the source of all delight. Activity is a health-tonic, while inaction is weakness. Inaction is death, and the symbol of death; it's the cause of timidity, and is the forerunner of the ailment of lethargy. How, then, can you hope to flourish and prosper by giving up revolution and taking refuge in lethargy? Running water is ever pure and clean, while the stagnant water stinks. Insects take birth in stinking water. So long as there is heartbeat it remains active, and there is life. The moment there remains no heartbeat death overtakes man. So long as there is breathing there is life; the moment breathing ceases, life ceases. The goods train carries load in millions of tonnes if the engine works. This power ceases with the engine stopping. So long as the spring is in motion, the watch works and gives time. The watch is useless once the spring stops working. So long as the wind blows, it is called wind. If no wind, there is suffocation.

So long as the wind blows it feels life-giving; when it stops blowing every man feels suffocation. What's the power

in movement or motion? Let me explain it in some detail, so that your feeble mind may pick up something of it. When it rises, it sinks big ships. What are these tides of the ocean? They are just the manifestation of its motion or activity. Likewise, during a storm big trees are uprooted. What's this storm? This is also the magic of movement. Whenever there are floods, water level rises abnormally. Everything is submerged, even the villages vanish. What's this phenomenon, called floods? This is also a movement. What's the speed of a river? It's only an outpouring of an activity. It's water in its sprinkling, rising and diversifying activity. What are the sun's heat and light? This is also the magic of motion. The light in motion dances, and creates sparks that generate heat and light. What's electricity? This also is motion. Lightning is the natural movement. Its thunder, its brightness and its impact are the proofs of its motion. What's thunder? It's just a phenomenon of motion. The intense actions and interactions in the environment constitute thunder. However, I have here explained at some length the phenomena of movement, motion or activity and the disadvantages of passivism. Now it's your turn to tell me the virtues, if any, of inaction or lethargy. I do not find any. And, if you are not yet convinced of the disadvantages of quietitude, let me clarify by giving some domestic examples. The water in the village pond is stagnant, it develops moss. Have you ever come across such a phenomenon in the flowing water? Never. This is indicative of the difference between motion and rest. Give water its motion and its freshness will continue; if it remains still, it starts stinking. If you keep the horse in motion, it will be providing a good ride. Keep it within the four walls of the

stable, it will resist. This also is the difference between motion and rest. If you turn the chapati again and again into the fire, it will be baked and will not get burnt up; if you don't turn it around, it will get burnt up, will be tasteless and not fit for consumption. This also is the difference between motion and rest. If you continue to turn upside down the soil, weed out the unwanted growth, it will give you a rich crop; but if you don't turn it any -way, don't disturb it, don't plough it, the crop will be poor and diseased, and the produce will be less in quantity. This also is the difference between motion and rest.

It has been my endeavour to make you understand, and if you have not understood even by now not even God can make you understand. After all our interests coincide, cannot say, therefore, anything wherein there is no good for you.

The difference between motion and stillness is just the same as between life and death, strength and weakness, health and disease, victory and defeat, master and slave, poverty and prosperity. In motion lies the secret of life; in rest the secret of death. Motion brings respect; rest brings ignominy. Motion leads to the lordship; slavery comes from lethargy. O peasant! speak out which of the two you like: favouring motion with courage for success, or choosing inaction with its dreadful consequences. Activism centers around the purpose to progress, to seek dignity and wealth; while inaction leads to degradation, disrespect and poverty. In my view, it is high time that you drink a cupful of wine. See, then, what the state of intoxication causes by way of its effect

of transformation. I once again quote Iqbal here to portray this state of transformation. He says:

*Etbare oh bakhshad kahra,
Kuvvate sheran dehar roobahara,
Khakra-e oje shurraya men dahad,
Katrae ab pinhaya dariya men dahad.
Khamoshi ran shorshe mehshar kunad,
Paye kubak az khune baz ahmar kund.*

(Activity gives the blade of grass the strength of a mountain; and confidence gives a fox the power and strength of a lion. God raises dust to the highest of points in the sky, and a drop of water acquires the distinction of making the great flow of a river. The struggle creates a loud explosion out of stillness, and it's God's power, again, that makes the sparrow's wings red with the hawk's blood).

Lionised Trait or Sheepish Mentality

When the war-drum is beaten, the peasant-soldier, equipped with armoury, marches forward to face the enemy; all the qualities of a lion find their revival in him. The loud gun fires and bright swords fail to frighten him. The tip of the bayonet of the rifle is no match to the thorn of the jungle for him. The loud noise caused by the explosion of the bombs cannot frighten him, while the bursts of bullets are no more than showers of rain for him. He straightway aims at the direction of bullets, like a lion. When he fights his brother, he is least afraid of breaking the skull into pieces like a watermelon. But his chivalry is limited only to the battlefield

and the fights with his brother. Barring these occasions, he does not roar like a lion; but betrays the mentality of a sheep. Hence he is wanting in the qualities of a lion. All his qualities, called rajasik dispositions in Sanskrit, have disappeared, or weakened. I ask the peasant if he wants to live like a lion or a sheep. Will he prefer the roarings of a Lion or the meek voice of the sheep? Will he like to be a worshipper of the traits of a Lion, or of a sheepish mentality?

O peasant! if you ask me I shall unhesitatingly advise you to be a lion and condemn the sheepish mentality. I include in the category of the lion-like traits the combined name for which in Sanskrit is fairly commendable: namely, rajasik dispositions. Conceivably, the qualities of greatness are signified by the rajasik dispositions, but I cannot say this with certitude. Valour, self-respect, activism, desire, wishes, restlessness, catholicity of outlook, etc., are such qualities, characteristics and inclinations whose relation is with the active principles of the life-force: that is to say, with movement, *elan vital*, and values of life. I give them the name of 'lionised traits.' The negation of all these qualities, characteristics and dispositions constitutes sheepish mentality.

Oh peasant! don't be a coward, be brave, don't be afraid, be awe inspiring. Don't let the thought of weakness and powerlessness invade your mind. Keep the ideas of strength and power in your mind. Don't look on yourself as inferior and contemptible, but instead as great and respectable. Don't tolerate disrespect, but learn to respect yourself and others will follow suit. Give up lethargy and indifference; adopt alertness and carefulness instead. Don't fall a prey to laziness. Keep high spirits and be optimistic. Don't think that you can

do nothing. Take yourself to be a repository of power and strength. Don't lose initiative. Learn to utilize your resources even in a state of frustration.

Be laborious and hardworking, and be a karma-yogi par excellence. To rely on self-satisfaction is to lose and fritter away one's power to act. Kindle the fire of hope in your mind, Engage your intellect in thinking and prayer. Keep the mind enlightened. Don't cast your gaze at the ground, direct it to the sky. Why do you look at the fate of the earth? Aim at the heights of the sky. Why are you sitting with your gaze at the depths of the ocean? Turn the gaze towards the heights of the mountain.

O peasant! reflect a little. Has a timid person ever earned a name? Has a lazy person ever won a battle? Has any memorable event ever been recorded about frustrated person? Who are those who, though dead, are even alive? Those who had initiative, courage. Who have conquered thrones? Only those who left their countries with coffin on their heads. Babur invaded India four times, and returned frustrated; but he didn't lose heart. He came back fifth time, and founded an empire which remained under his descendants for over three hundred years. The Englishmen came later, and captured India. Those, who adopted laziness and indifference, lost the kingdom established by their ancestors. Ibrahim Lodhi and Sirajudd-Daula, both lost their kingdoms.

O peasant! look around. Who's the king of the jungle? Lion or the Jackal? Who's the king of flights? Hawk or sparrow? Who's the king of the sky? Sun or Moon? Don't you wish to learn a lesson from all this?

The lion kills an animal, and whatever is left over after eating is eaten by the jackals. The birds are the preys of the hawk, but it does not pick up a dead sparrow from the ground to gratify its hunger. The Sun gives out light which the Moon reflects. Tell me as to which position you will like to have: that of a lion, jackal” hawk or sparrow” the Sun or the Moon.

The serpent is dreaded by everyone; so is the crocodile. People are afraid’ of going into the water where crocodiles are reported to be existent. When the serpent has been killed children kick it around. What do you infer from all this? It shows that so long as you have power you enjoy respect from others as well as your authority. But when these qualities vanish, you lose your respect and authority. People bow before the rulers. Every body respects the bureaucrats. Why? Simply because they enjoy the lion-like traits. And you may have heard the saying: “Utara asana mardak nam.” (one who leaves his seat is called dead). Anyone who loses his lion-like nature, loses his respect too. But if you the peasant, want to acquire the lion-like characteristics you will have to change your nature. Now you fear, hide, feel small and avoid dangers. Mere anticipations make you restless; you fear loss. All this is so because you have the traits of a sheep; give up fear if you want to be a lion. Realize that there exists nothing like fear. There is nothing like danger; it is creation of imagination. And if anywhere there are things like fear, danger, etc., welcome them. Fight them, defeat them. Spend your time by remaining amidst them.

Agar khudai hayyatander khatre ji.

(If you crave for life learn to live amidst dangers).

Look, nothing could be had without taking risks. You cannot have anything without undergoing risks. You want to

collect diamonds, but are afraid of getting into the water. How can both these things be possible?

*Badarya dar munafa beshummar ast,
Deegar khwahi salamat bar kinarast.*

(It is good to dive into the river, but if you prefer safety, remain on the bank and don't dive into it. If you want diamonds, jump into the river, but if you don't risk your life, then keep standing on the bank and abandon the idea of collecting diamonds).

Wealth, honour, greatness, advancement, etc., cannot be acquired by one with a sheepish mentality. If you want to possess such things, develop the qualities of a lion. If you don't, vanish from the world; your life has no worth. You are an unwanted burden on earth, and you possess only a poor personality.

Oh peasant! I want to see you alive, and that too with honour. I want to maintain your dignity. But I don't want to see this dignity sullied by the sheepish mentality. I am desirous of keeping your dignity intact, but I want your existence linked up with the lionized traits. The lionish traits are necessary for all this. The sheepish mentality is a great impediment for all these. But presently sheepish mentality has overtaken you, and you are utterly lacking in lionish qualities. I am keen to see in you the emergence of the lionish traits. With all the sincerity at my command, I advise you to give up the tendency to weep, and assume hard postures. Give up slavery, and assume the status of a master. Prefer lordship over meekness. Don't fear death. Don't be grass, be a horse; be a hunter, not the prey. Don't be oppressed; be a saviour. Don't be helpless; be helpful.

One thing more. O peasant! Weakness is a great sin in this world. The world bows before power. In the contemporary world both justice and right derive their justification from the egrees of power. See what the wise Iqbal says:

*Zindagi kist ast va hasil kuvvat ast,
 Sharah rarnze haq vo batil kuvvat ast
 Muddai garmayadare az kuvvat ast
 Darvah O beniyaze az hujjat ast.*

(Life is like cultivation and its crop is power. The differentiation between truth and falsehood is again to be ascertained by reference to power. If the claimant is powerful and has the requisite guts, he needs no logic or evidence to justify his claim).

The Future of Punjab Peasantry

Change is characteristic of the world. Change is the law of nature. Presently the world is passing through a swift current of change. India, too, is not free from the current of this tide. Punjab, like other provinces in India, has been affected by the current of change. Everyone is concerned with his advancement and goodness. The other communities in Punjab seem to be very prosperous. It's not clear as to whether the mediocre-minded peasant has reflected on his own good or not; whether his mind has warmed up by means of the thoughts of progress, or is still as cold as an ice-cube. Nobody knows. The present is a critical psychological moment, and the thieves will sweep away all the household goods of those who are in deep slumber. One, who is alert, wide awake, and courageous, will not lag behind. What one attains will depend upon his alertness, alacrity and initiative.

The peasant has so far enjoyed his slumber to his heart's satisfaction. The friends have looted his house to their heart's content. Though presently he is not fully asleep, yet is changing sides on his bed. His eyes are sleepy, and he's rubbing them. He's heaving sighs, and his body is yet in a state of drowsiness. I say, Oh peasant! you have enjoyed the pleasure of being on bed; now put your feet down and descend on the field of action. By now he does not know as to who is calling upon him to action. Is he his true sympathizer, or his fan? I am calling him aloud fearing that my voice may not reach my brother's ears. The people, who have administered some intoxicant, like opium, say: "Who's this person crying hoarse? Is he his sympathizer? The sun has yet not risen- it's still time to sleep. When it's time get up, we shall on our own wake him up". But my dear peasant! listen attentively. You have been so far treating my voice as a voice in wilderness. Now pay full attention to me. I am your true servant, not your master. I am a bit upset because of my love for you; this is the sole reason for my raised and swift voice that I have love for you. I cannot afford any risk in not conveying my exhortation to your ears-move, get up, hurry up. I have been waiting for long and have displayed enough of patience. It's not in my power to have any more of them. Even if now you are late in getting up, mind it, I will push you down the bed. I did not do so upto now lest you should, misguided by your detractors, misconstrue this as a proof of my being your fan.

Oh peasant! Kumbhkaran-like sleeper! Oh dreamer like rabbit! your household has been looted; your gate has been smashed. Your orchard is afire; Your house has been struck by lightning. Yet, you lie intoxicated in your slumber. Look, this is not the time to sleep; it is time to get up; it is

time to move about; it is time to work. Take care of your household- look after your orchard and your thresher of grains. Your laziness, liked by the thieves, is making for your ruin; your negligence is serving as fire in your orchard; your carelessness is serving as lightning for your house, and for all that, it is really surprising that you are unaware of all this; it is equally so if you don't hear the call of your chowkidar.

O peasant! do you know why I am bothering you so much? I fight with the government for you and plead that my brother is burdened with excessive taxes which should be reduced. I also fight with the moneylender for reducing the interest burden on you. I fight with the non-agriculturists for you, and have also locked my horns with the corrupt officials for the same purpose. Listen, I, as one, am of the view that the Indian peasantry holds the key to the country's independence, The independence of India depends upon the unity of the Hindus and Muslims, and such a unity is best demonstrated by the Punjab peasants. I want to see the Punjab peasant prosperous and united. I am desirous of seeing him awakened, and standing on his feet, busy in action and organization.

Oh peasant! there is the divine decree for you to wear the Punjab crown; of course, subject to certain conditions. If you meet these conditions, you will have the crown, and the throne of Punjab will be at your command. Your advancement is inevitable; your future is bright. The angels of God are standing with the umbrella and the crown; only the orders are awaited. As soon as there are orders, this umbrella will be there to provide you shade, and the crown will be glittering on your head. When the orders come, will very much depend

upon your initiative, adroitness and your far-sightedness.

Now listen to what the conditions are. We have a two-fold condition. First, you must organize yourself. Second, you must give a word that after getting power, you will do justice to all, and that you will not deprive others of their rights; that you will embrace all those who have suffered because of the unfavorable planets of their fate, because of the atrocities of their society and the accidents of history; that you will not provide opportunity to complain against you by those who have been unkind to you. Fulfill this two-fold condition, and then see the spectacle of your advancement; have a vision of the future of your dignity. I am sure you will meet this two-fold condition and take full advantage of god's grace.

The only question now is as to when your bright future will be transformed into reality. To predict this is not possible. The future that can be the source of delight for your well-wishers and friends can be brought about by your initiative alone. The future that will raze your enemies to the ground with your progress, can be materialized within a limited number of days. O God's man! just say when you will stop changing sides in your bed; when you will give up rubbing your eyes, and taking sideways movements of your body; and you would allow dust to kiss your feet.

Permit me to tell you how the conditions of organization can be met, and what difficulties are likely to crop up in this path. First about the obstacles. Once there is the knowledge about obstacles, organization is not a whit difficult. For centuries you were unconcerned about this world and the beyond. Different men and classes had been busy

looting your household. The path of religion was recommended to keep you within the realm of dreams. This very prescription has also been made use of previously to rule you into deep sleep. Now that you are betraying signs of waking, those very people, who would like you to be fast asleep, would try to administer some poisonous palliatives, so as to send you to sleep again. They will mix religion in the sweetened water of syrup, and once you drink it you will relapse into a state of unconsciousness. They will make religion the medicine for you and will administer its tablets so that you are kept in a state of drowsiness. Some one would say.: Sikhism is in danger; some would say; Hinduism is in danger; some would say: Islam—is in danger. But remember—Sikhism, Hinduism and Islam will not at all be harmed by your organization. Only, those selfish people will be harmed who spread hatred, jealousy and bitterness in the name of religion.

Is there any occupation which has not been organized on a secular basis? In our own province there are many such instances: engineers, doctors, hakims, vaidyas, traders, advocates—who have formed their own organization without any basis on religion. But it is much of a surprise that when people pursuing the largest and the oldest occupation in the world start organizing themselves on secular lines, priests, maulvis, granthis, preceptors, mullas, gyanis, advocates, journalists, shopkeepers (and who not) feel incorrigibly upset. Don't you perceive a point here? Yes, the point is that in the event of your waking up and your organizing yourselves, these people fear loss of their livelihood and leadership. If, however, you prefer to be their slave, then act as their satellite and collect money for them by way of

subscription. Then they are prepared to permit you to organize yourselves. Just note that the Congress has organized a Lahore District Kisan Sabha; the Congressmen have put up such organizations at many places. But when the peasants organize themselves on their own, the non-agriculturists are in a state of turmoil. Why? Because they want to lead peasantry by the nose and keep their funds in their custody. The government also views such peasant organizations with certain reservations. It does not realize that it is now the time for peasants to organize themselves, and no body can stop them. The question now is whether such an organization is to be under the peasants themselves, or under the Congress, or under some organization formed in pursuance of the directions of extremist elements and their leadership. In itself it is a very important issue, and I don't want to be embroiled in any controversy. I would, however, like to refer to the, obstructions in the way.

The moneylender, too, creates impediments in the way of the peasants' organization, because he finds his own disadvantage in this; the corrupt officials, the patwaris in particular, are afraid of the peasants' organization. And there is wide spread consternation if the official or the patwari happens to be non-agriculturist. Every non-agriculturist official, corrupt or otherwise, takes the peasant's organization worse than the die of plague. It's their class interests that compel them to do so; they want to suppress such an organization by bringing a bad name to it.

If the difficulties arising out of an organization are not properly weighed beforehand, such an organization does not succeed. That's why I have highlighted certain main

obstacles in detail, so that you face them boldly. Keeping in view the forthcoming provincial administration, it is possible that some change may come about in its behaviour. But it is very difficult to forecast anything in such matters. That is to say, your organization should assume the form of a strong and popular central Zamindar League (or Kisan Sabha). Every district and sub-division should have branches of this party, and there should be at least one English daily newspaper, and several others in Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi. Every district should have a weekly of its own. Every district and sub-division should have a band of active workers of the Zamindar League to propagate the principles and programmes of the party.

Oh peasant! if you satisfy this two-fold condition, God's representatives are keenly awaiting to hand over the administration of Punjab to you. Don't feel dejected, don't let your courage subside. Don't think this is all a hard nut to crack. Don't infer from your present condition that you have been so for ever and shall remain so for all time to come. Have faith in the Real Emperor, the Emperor of Emperors; have faith in your muscle power. Generate power in your thoughts, and have faith in your advancement. Generate in yourself the firmness of purpose and self-reliance, believing that the government is yours; that you are the custodian of the government, that you are fit for it. If you have the requisite faith, you will find yourself to be the supremo of the Punjab government as soon as the new constitutional reforms are introduced (1937 elections). If you regret your inability to meet these conditions, conditions like slavery, poverty, starvation, humiliation, disrespect and destruction are lying in wait for their old prey; go and get yourself entangled by

them, and be worthy of their plan to crush you. If there is any occupation in the world based on honest earning, it is that of the master of the plough alone—the peasant. If there is in this world any living instance of a person with patience and contentment, it is the peasant only.

My Message for Peasantry

If there is the warmth of devotion and faith in any person's chest, it is in the peasant's only. Liberal, generous, pure in intentions, unprejudiced at heart, servant of mankind, rearer of the livestock, devotee of his God, and the well-wisher of the government--it is the peasant. Yet, he is unlucky. The animals destroy his crops; his neighbours cheat him, the forces of nature continue to unload calamities on him. The Lord of both the worlds seeks to test his tolerance, not by his grace and kindness, but by giving him sorrows and sufferings. The government is always indifferent to him. What all this amounts to is that the peasant is the master of such a misfortune that, if he touches the gold, it turns into dust. He plants mango saplings, but harvests thorns in return. In return for his love he begets hatred, and in return for service he begets disrespect. Why all this? On a little reflection the answer to 'why?' is not far to seek.

The peasant is not opportunistic, nor pragmatic, nor familiar with the worldly ups and downs; he has not yet learnt to walk in steps with others. The peasant has not realized the significance of the truism, "While in Rome, do as the Romans do; as times are, so should be your gaze." In this mechanical and blind age, patience is no more than stupidity; inaction is but another name for death.

Forgiveness is an ingredient of weakness and powerlessness. The Western civilization is in full sway today. Patience has been replaced by aspirations, inaction by action; and forgiveness by fear or awe. Yet, the peasant has been living in old grooves; he has not seen the worldly trends, nor has he known which way the wind blows. That's why he stumbles, and has his instant fall. He receives kicks from others, and is humiliated at their hands. Yet, he does not abandon his old habits. He is unhappy with the treatment meted out by others, yet has not retraced his steps from ignorance. He stands looted for his ignorance and self forgetfulness, yet is sticking to his grandeur.

*Hai teri jillat hi kuchh teri sharafat ki daleet,
Jis ki ghaflat ko Malik rote hen vahi ghaflat hai tu.*

(Your humiliation is a positive proof of your ignorance. You are the carelessness yourself for which even the gods shed their tears).

But this carelessness will not do now. If this indifference lasts, there will be no prestige. If this ungratefulness of yours continues, life itself will lose its thread. If there still lurks in the peasant's mind the desire to lead a respectful life, he will have to arm himself with the twentieth century armoury. If the peasant has any concern for his life's existence, he will have to take up the shield from the Western civilization. The peasant may well ask: What are the twentieth century weapons, and what's this shield of the Western civilization? If I need to state in a few words about the twentieth century weapons and the shield of the Western civilization, I should say that these weapons and the shield are organization and publicity. Both these things are of

different hues and shapes which will work as weapons and shield from time to time. The peasants must get united; all should get closer to each other for collective gains. Let them forget differences of religion; let it be confined to the four walls of the temples, mosques and gurudwaras. The prejudiced maulvis, pandits and granthis use religion for generating jealousy and hatred. Whereas our mutual worldly benefits enjoin upon us to get united with one another; these maulvis, pandits and granthis unnecessarily bring in religion so as to cause a bad name for it.

Leaving aside religion, it is absolutely necessary in the Punjab politics that the peasants should, as a matter of necessity and naturalness, learn to get united. But our priests, maulvis and granthis try to blindfold us in such a way that we are always divided amongst ourselves. These people try to isolate the Hindus from the Muslims, and the Muslims from the Hindus by reminding them of some old unpleasant incidents which have no relevance to the present context. Those very people who had said the following are now conditioned by hatred:

*Mehfilon mein purani dastanon ko na chher,
Rang par jo ab na aye in fasanon ko na chher.*

(In conferences, never touch upon old themes; don't take up those tales for repetition that do not admit of sounding agreeable).

But all peasants are alike. Their interests are common and inter-related. Everyone stands to gain if there are good rains at proper times. If the produce is good and the market rates are high, every body gains. If the irrigation charges are

reduced, every body stands to save money. If on the contrary, there is drought or hailstorm, or grain prices decline or the land revenue is enhanced, every body, will stand to lose equally, whether he is a Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. But the misguiding lot of the leaders sow in them the seeds of fissiparous tendencies, estranging one from the other. Influenced by the ill-conceived religion, the poor peasants don't understand that "it is not good to remain indifferent to the travails of the fellow-traveller."

Nahin begangi achchhi rafike rahe manzil se.

It's utmost necessary to teach: "For you the course should be not to remain indifferent to those who are your own; don't remain a stranger to those who are on your side, if at all you are keen to remain in this world."

*Na reh apnon se beparwah isi men kher hai teri,
Agar Idanzoor hai duniya men aur begana khoo rehna.*

It's also desirable to teach the peasants the lesson of self-confidence. Dependence upon God alone will not do. God has gifted us with the power of hard-work, and he expects us to utilize this power and rely upon it. It's a great folly to rely on the government for anything. It's world's great characteristic that it bows before power.

So is with the government. It respects power and measures justice in terms of power. When looked from a true perspective, both the human and the divine government accord recognition to man's muscle power. They look down upon the lazy and worthless people, and help those who help themselves.

*Yahi aene kudrat hai yahi asloobe fitrat hai,
Jo hai rahie amal men gamjan mehboobe fitrat hai.*

(Those who tread the path of action are dear to nature. This is the law of nature, and this is the characteristic of nature).

The rulers too, have the same nature: that which the nature and God have. If I can offer any message to my people on the basis of my acquaintance with them it is this that they should organize themselves, and take to active politics, as enthusiastically and seriously as toiling on their lands, bidding farewell to laziness, because “in action alone lies the word’s Existence.”

Let the peasants propagate their interests and necessities; they should ventilate their grievances and difficulties unhesitatingly. They should abandon their silence and raise voice aloud in the world of politics. Quietness never pays, and no body bothers about quietitude. Strictly speaking, crying aloud is the chief characteristic of a man of politics.

*Chaman zor siyasat mein khamoshi maut hai balbu.
Yahan ki jindagi pabandi-e-rasmen phugan tak hai.*

(Oh Nightingale! In this world of politics, to remain silent is as dangerous as death. It is the life’s expectation here to continue the struggle, and never to sit silent).

(Note: Out of total of 17 articles published in the *JG*, as many as 6 appeared in 1933— May 28, 1933, June 28, 1933; July 12, 1933; July 19, 1933, August 19, 1933, August 30, 1933).

Bhakra Dam : A Parting Gift to Peasantry

In the early part of the last century an English Superintendent Engineer, Nicholson, stumbled upon a plan to build a massive dam at a site of the mountainous Bhakra of Punjab. This was conceived in such a way that it could irrigate the dry, arid districts of the south-east Punjab; Rohtak, Hisar and Gurgaon. For a number of years the plan gathered dust in the official files of the secretaries of the various concerned departments — namely, finance and irrigation — and when none came forward to pursue the matter, it was sent to cold storage.

However, Chhotu Ram had heard of some such plan when he entered the Punjab Council in 1923, and evinced keen interest in its broad objective and far reaching implications. After having gone through its chief objectives for a number of years and having been convinced of its immense irrigation potentiality for a large tract of the Haryana region, he started raising questions in the House. Happily enough, the scheme made much headway during the two years of his stint as minister of agriculture. But after he was just a member of the House, he found that his colleagues in the

ministry had developed cold feet. Chhotu Ram was determined to pursue the matter threadbare, talked to some technical persons and brought the scheme for discussion before the House and gradually others of his folk began to draw closer to him. His main point was that the three districts of Ambala Division (comprising those that constitute the present Haryana state) were almost every year in the grip of repeated famines and droughts. These districts, he emphasized, were what he called 'economic plague spots in the Punjab. If the Government was really earnest in affording relief to these districts, the only thing to be done was to take early steps in the construction of the Bhakra Dam project.

He reminded his colleagues that four years before, the House had unanimously passed a resolution in favour of the mighty project and that the Government had accepted the resolution for favour of implementation in letter and spirit. The Revenue Member, Chhotu Ram recalled, had informed the House that the project was on the priorities listed for implementation.

Discussion in the House

At the very outset Sikander Hayat wanted to know the year in which a resolution to this effect was passed. Prompt came the reply from Chhotu Ram: 'It was 28th February 1929' Chhotu Ram was able to recall with an air of certainty that the said resolution was accepted by the Government with a sense of commitment and in good grace. However, Henry Craik, Finance Member to the Government of Punjab, intervened to inform Chhotu Ram that the Punjab Government

had spent over ten lakhs of rupees. Chhotu Ram thereupon resumed his speech and said that the money spent had been used to meet expenses on surveys and much more remains to be done to arrive at a final stage of approval of details. He informed the members in the House that even final estimates had not yet been completed. But whether the preparation of these estimates had been undertaken in earnest or not he did not quite know. What Chhotu Ram was in a position to say at that stage was that an officer had been put on a special duty to examine and even revise these estimates. No body could say for certain whether these estimates had been accepted in their final position. What was certain was that the Government of India's Survey Party had finished its allotted work. These surveys, Chhotu Ram continued, had cost the Government something like ten to twelve lakhs of rupees. It was the preparation of detailed surveys and other details that had not been revealed either by the Survey Party or the Government of India. What Chhotu Ram said he would do was to call for final estimates as a prerequisite to securing the sanction of the Government of India and the Secretary of State. Chhotu Ram assured that as soon as the sanction was received vigorous attempts would be made to start construction of the project. So long as the Bhakra Dam did not come up in reality, the people of south-east Punjab, Chhotu Ram pointed out, would continue to fall prey to famines and droughts. It was all well known that famines and droughts not only brought sorrow and suffering in their trials but also cost the Government of Punjab a good deal. Chhotu Ram spoke of a communique, issued by the Government or by the Director of Information Bureau on its behalf, that thirty-two lakhs of rupees were spent during the

last two years alone and practically in the two districts of Gurgaon and Hisar. So, in Chhotu Ram's view, all such expenditure would disappear if facilities for irrigation of lands in that part of the province were provided.

After some time Chhotu Ram moved a resolution in the House which read as follows:

“That this Council recommends to the Government that vigorous attempts should be made to obtain the sanction of the Government of India and the Secretary of State for the execution of the Bhakra Dam, and that the actual execution of the Project should be taken in hand without avoidable delay as soon as the requisite sanction has been obtained”.

The resolution was adopted and accepted with a thunderous applause. Chhotu Ram thereupon began to trace out briefly the history of the Bhakra Dam Project. He stated that the site for constructing a dam in order to reserve the water of the Sutlej for the purpose of irrigation was discovered as early as 25 years ago. The preliminary inquiry about the project was taken up in hand in 1915. In 1919 the estimates were completed and the preliminary inquiry came to an end. The result of the inquiry was reported to the Government. The enquiry committee wanted the site to be 400 feet high. The area proposed to be irrigated was calculated to be 25 lakh acres and the total expenditure was estimated at Rs.14,14,74,926.

In view of these facts and figures the Government expected that even those tracts, where irrigation facilities did not exist, would be provided with them, and that in future

they would be free from the devastating effects of famines. In 1919 an assurance was held out by Sir Michael O' Dwyer, the then Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab, in an open durbar at Rohtak, where a large number of representatives of Ambala Division had assembled, that irrigation projects were under contemplation which on execution would turn large tracts of land from jungle into mangal. Chhotu Ram asserted that even after a lapse of 14 years those jungles still remained jungles, so that the promised mangal was yet out of sight. He further pointed out that in 1922 or 1923 the Government changed its details all of a sudden about the scheme for two main reasons; firstly, it feared that the rock at site where it was proposed to erect a bund was not sufficiently solid and strong to bear the pressure of water which would accumulate behind the dam; and secondly, because if that scheme was started it was very doubtful whether the income to be derived from it would be enough to meet working expenses and defray the interest charges on the capital expenditure incurred on the scheme. Consequently, the Government hesitated in taking the scheme in hand. At the same time there was another scheme under contemplation of the Government, and that was the Thal project which, in the opinion of the Government, would bring not only more income to the province by the auction of Crown waste lands, but would also add to the prosperity of the people. In 1924 a resolution was moved by Chhotu Ram in the House which was accepted by the Government with certain modifications. The Government then agreed to take the Bhakra Dam scheme in hand as soon as the construction of the Thal project had sufficiently advanced to admit the work of the Bhakra project being undertaken, provided, of course, that the Council sanctioned money for the purpose and the scheme

was found sound from the financial and engineering points of view. Consequently, in 1925 the Government appointed geologists to look into this scheme and to report whether site chosen for the dam was a practicable one, and also whether a bund could be erected there without any risk of water making fissures in the rock and devastating the districts around. The report submitted by the experts was favourable, but they suggested that Government, in order to make doubly sure, should send for a specialist from America. Thereupon it was decided by the Government to send an officer Mr. Nicholson, to America to study the structural designs of dams there, and bring with him a specialist to report on the possibilities of the scheme. Mr. Willey came here for the purpose. He saw the site and examined the rock and reported that it was sufficiently strong to bear the pressure of the water that will accumulate behind the dam and that there was no danger of its breaking harming the districts around. Mr. Willey further advised the Government to make a dam 500 feet in height instead of a dam 400 feet high. The Government then indicated its willingness to take this scheme in hand. The estimates of expenditure were, therefore, revised and increased to Rs.23,48,53,484 in 1926. But this increase in expenditure meant a corresponding increase in the area to be irrigated by the scheme. Where originally estimated expenditure amounted to Rs. 23,50,00,000 for irrigating 47,50,000 acres of land, that is to say, the area to be irrigated by the scheme almost doubled itself and the estimated amount increased by 60 percent. Chhotu Ram further informed that another resolution was passed in the House in 1929. While speaking on the resolution Fazl-i-Hussain remarked: "Now what is the agreement? It is

that the Council as well as the Government is definitely committed to the Bhakra Dam Project.”

It was a strenuous task for Chhotu Ram to convince the Government that the construction of the Bhakra Dam project was by all means a necessity for the drought -prone districts of Hissar, Rohtak and Gurgaon. He warned the Government against thinking in terms of profit or loss, but in terms of the welfare of the people, “ I am really sorry to say,” Chhotu Ram said in anguish, “that our Government has become a bania Government. I am sure no Government can work on bania principles. God never intended governments to be always calculating, for in that case there would be very little difference between a bania’s shop and Government administration. I hope the Government will realize the force of my argument.”

Chhotu Ram pointed out another difficulty which had cropped up in the way of the execution of the Bhakra Dam project. It is that the Raja of Bilaspur State was not prepared to agree to accept land in any part of the British territory in lieu of the land that would come under the project in hand. Chhotu Ram thought that it was not a new difficulty and that it must have been present even at the time when the Punjab Government negotiated with the Raja at some period between 1915 and 1919. Chhotu Ram further added that he was inclined to believe that during these four or five years when the Government was negotiating with the Raja some sort of settlement must have been arrived at, and that the Raja must have been brought around to waive the objection. This general impression had gained currency in the public. But even if for the sake of argument, Chhotu Ram continued, it was admitted

that the Raja did not give his consent originally and had not made up his mind upto this time, he was not at all prepared to believe that the Raja was not amenable to reason. Time had come for the Raja to understand that the scheme would alter the fate of the people, and usher in an era of peace, progress and prosperity.

Obstacles

The chief obstacle to the construction of the dam, in Chhotu Ram's opinion, was redtapism. In 1937 the matter was again raised on the floor of the House by Chhotu Ram, this time again as Minister of Development. He maintained the view that the construction of the dam was one of the most essential projects which had to be given effect to if real substantial good was to be done to the peasants of Punjab. For the delay being caused in undertaking the project in hand he did not blame the Government. He was forthright in stating that the Government had always been and was prepared to undertake the project in hand as soon as certain obstacles, which were standing in the way, were removed. He informed the members that as soon as the first session of the Assembly was over, the first thing he did was to send the file and asked for some important information. He sought to assure the members, especially from the south-eastern districts, that he would not allow any colleague here a moment's rest until he did something to bring to the thirsty lands of those districts water to irrigate them.

The Bhakra Dam project was not, to be sure, every man's cup of tea. The three prominent parties to it — the Secretary of State, the Central Government and the provincial Government of

the Punjab — seldom did anything to coordinate their activities. With the solitary exception of Chhotu Ram, none ever cared to do anything for its construction, just because the entire project required a very fertile imagination. That was the sole reason why the matter lingered on indefinitely. The matter cropped up again in 1942 when Shri Ram Sharma asked why the project had figured in the budget estimates almost every year. Chhotu Ram as Minister of Development, said that there were certain preliminaries to be gone through, cannot be denied. He said in reply, “that two highly qualified engineers were sent to America for studying the high dam . They brought b a c k with them models and photographs of high dams. These materials, Chhotu Ram asserted, were displayed before the members and were generally appreciated and approved. If the concerned member had not seen them, it was not our fault,” said Chhotu Ram.

Chhotu Ram enumerated some main reasons for delay. Firstly, it was a misunderstanding that he had asked the Punjab Government to bring pressure to bear on the Raja of Bilaspur. Secondly, after meeting opposition of Bilaspur State, the Government of Punjab started looking for some alternative scheme. Chhotu Ram was frank in saying that he had in mind other alternatives if the Bilaspur Maharaja refused to accede a certain portion of his territory. One of them was to have wells sunk along the river Jamuna so that water could be carried through channels to the thirsty, arid lands of Rohtak, Hisar and Gurgaon. Another reason was the opposition member spreading the rumour lands belong to Chhotu Ram’s areas of political influence. All such allegations, he retorted, were baseless and motivated, far from truth and reality.

No further endeavour seems to be called for asserting that the Bhakra Dam was Chhotu Ram's first love and he left no stone unturned to make it a living reality in his own life time. He had the ambition to make the south-east Punjab, now Haryana, the hero of Green Revolution. Whether as Minister or just a member of legislature, he seldom forgot to raise the issue of construction of the Bhakra Dam Project. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that he was the real founder of the Dam. In other words, nothing of the sort would have come into existence had he not pursued it till its final stages or approval. By the end of 1944 much that was to be done had been done. The one obstacle to have been overcome was overcome. The Sind Government had filed a case for compensation with the Privy Council. Chhotu Ram saw to it that prompt arrangements were made for prompt payment in order to accelerate the pace of the proposed project. The Ruler of the Bilaspur State, who had filed a case against the proposed scheme of Dam construction, was another serious hurdle. Most part of the Dam to be constructed fell within the territorial jurisdiction of the Bilaspur State. The Raja was ultimately prevailed upon and an agreement was signed whereby the permission was obtained for building the reservoir on the land given by the Raja. But the tragedy was that the Dam taking a real shape was not completed in Chhotu Ram's life time. On every brick used in the construction of the Dam there lies hidden the mind and spirit of the great Architect, Chhotu Ram. If today the two sister states — Punjab and Haryana take pride in producing surplus wheat for the country, it was because of Chhotu Ram's vision and we know how true and how real the vision was. The peasant in both the states is not merely free from the clutches of the arrogant moneylender but is also

prosperous. He knows with a profoundly grateful heart who his real benefactor was and what he did for him. The peasants all over Haryana and adjoining states — particularly, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan — assemble on every Basant Panchami day for observing it as their thanksgiving day. Our Haryana and Punjab Governments have conveniently forgotten to associate Chhotu Ram's name who was its real founder. But if the peasants continue to remember their leader that also is not anything insignificant. Chhotu Ram shall ever continue to be the source of inspiration for all those who have done something for the cause of the poor and down-trodden. He was truly a visionary (rajnshi), a friend of the poor (deenbandhu) and a true torch-bearer (Rahbar-i-Azam) in his own inimitable way.

‘No, No, Never, Mr. Jinnah’

The emergence of the Unionist Party on the political horizons of Punjab promised to herald a new era distinct and distinguishable from earlier times in that it aroused hope of economic betterment of all sections of the society and of a thoroughly secular framework that shall be reflected in all its projects, policies and priorities. The underlying spirit of its Constitution loudly claimed to be universal in appeal, objective in reference and valid for all human beings alike. The Unionist philosopher, Dr. Mohammad Iqbal's song, 'sare jahan se achha Hindustan hamara' (Our Hindustan is the best in the whole world), was often acclaimed as the common heritage of all communities. However, even the Unionists were convinced that the concept of a wholly communal free Punjab was a far cry: but the common sight of Fazl -i-Hussain and Chhotu Ram standing hand in glove with each other in various functions did convince all the communities that what they meant was business.

The first ever political organization to take birth in India in 1885 was the Indian National Congress founded by Hume. Gradually, it attracted nationalists, generally those who had received liberal education in England and yearned for the

freedom of India from foreign yoke. Gandhiji returned from South Africa and became the nucleus of a powerful, yet peaceful political force. Mohammed Ali Jinnah was one who had accepted the Congress ideology and worked in this organization for some time

The Rise of Muslim League

The Indian Muslim League found its flowering and fruition in some Muslim League leaders, demand for a separate homeland, Pakistan. What was taken to be the creed of the Congress was nationalism, but now another creed appeared in the form of communalism. The difference between the two was clear: one was couched in reason, another in emotion. The two were antagonistic to each other, and a clash was bound to appear at some time. The Minto-Morley Reforms accentuated communalism by recommending separate electoral constituencies for different communities. Jinnah, who was a Congressman in the initial stage of his political career, found the time opportune for assuming the leadership of the Muslim community and began to widen the sphere of his aim and activity with each passing day.

Son of a leather merchant of Karachi. Jinnah had his schooling at the local level, and later went to England to qualify himself for the Barrister degree. He returned to India and started his practice at Bombay. He was thoroughly westernized in matters of food, marriage and morals. Although a Muslim by birth, by faith he was an agnostic. While in England he had heard noted thinkers like Bertrand Russell, Gladstone, Disraeli, John Stuart Mill, and many others. On his return to India he found Congress alone in the field and did some

secretarial job under Dadabhoy Noroji. Yet, the well known ethical concepts like ‘Satyagraha’, ‘ahimsa’ etc., did not mean anything to him. He kept the Muslim clergy at a distance, while he could recite only a few verses from the Quran. He had easy access to Congress heavyweights like Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru, and was liked for his secular ideas and ideals.

However, the political culture of those days did not suit him and he left for England to settle down for the peaceful life of a lawyer. But the Muslim League leaders were not prepared to lose a leader of such eminence and qualification, and he returned to India at their request. He was now confronted with the task of organizing, coordinating and supervising the provincial elections scheduled to be held under the Provincial Autonomy Act of 1935. Some of the provinces he was particularly interested in were Bengal, Sind, NWFP; and Punjab, but his achievements were insignificant. It was his ambition to attain the same status in the Muslim world as that of Gandhi Ji in the Congress organization. Notwithstanding initial ups and downs, he kept himself busy with the task of expanding the political base of the Muslim League in different provinces.

Fazl-i-Hussain’s Tiff with Jinnah

Fazl-i-Hussain’s term as member of the Viceroy’s Executive Council ended on March 31, 1935, and he resumed his office in the Ministry. Chhotu Ram was the leader of the Unionist Party, but being a Muslim leader of repute Fazl-i-Hussain was close to Jinnah. With elections to the Punjab Legislative Assembly drawing close, Jinnah made up his mind

to persuade Fazl-i-Hussain to join the Muslim League and contest the election under its banner. With this end in view, he visited Lahore in April 1936 and was guest of honour of the Unionist leader, Ahmadyar Khan Daultana. Since' Chhotu Ram was not directly concerned, he was asked to be available for consultations, if needed.

Jinnah's parleys with Fazl - i-Hussain mainly centred around the prospects of the Muslim League Party in the forthcoming election in Punjab. In this context he sought Fazl-i-Hussain's help and guidance as an active Muslim League leader. Fazl-i- Hussain may have been simply shocked on hearing all this, but he was self - composed and told him in unequivocal terms that he had been a Unionist for over a decade and still was firmly committed to his own political party based on certain norms for which he had full respect. He told the visiting dignitary that in a province like Punjab where there were Hindu and Sikhs in sufficiently large numbers, only a non -communal party could have chances of success. Obviously, Jinnah felt much disgusted and disappointed, and told Raja Narender Nath, who had come to meet him out of courtesy, "Raja Sahb, Fazli thinks he carries Punjab in his pocket. I am going to smash Fazli."

Jinnah received another jolt when Fazl-i- Hussain rejected his Central Parliamentary Board on the following grounds:

- (i) Provincial Autonomy means decentralization; it is wrong, therefore, to centralize provincial elections;
- (ii) Conditions in each province vary, and it is impossible to have a uniform principle applying to all.

- (iii) In many provinces Muslims may find it necessary to have non-communal organizations and in that case a central Muslim agency to conduct Muslim provincial elections would obviously be out of the question. Ordinarily, such would be the case in all the Muslim majority provinces. In the case of a province like NWFP it is foolish to conduct elections centrally.
- (iv) The initiative and elasticity for such purpose for each province should not be sacrificed for the sake of an All India leader's aspirations.
- (v) In the case of Punjab the Muslim majority in the Provincial Assembly is normal and it is almost impossible to secure a Muslim majority through a separate control of elections. In the case of the NWFP; it is possible, even probable, that the majority would lose its efficiency and power if it is not permitted to set up a provincial organization of a non - communal nature. What applies to Punjab applies *mutatis mutandis* Sind, and to a lesser extent, to Bengal.¹

As co-founder of the Unionist Party, Fazl-i-Hussain was obliged to abide by those conditions that had been clearly laid down. He could not conclude any agreement unilaterally. Fazl-i-Hussain died before a second meeting could take place.

Sikandar Hayat Khan's Pact with Jinnah

Consequent upon Fazl-i-Hussain's demise in July 1936, the mantle of the Party leadership fell on Chhotu Ram's

¹ CMG., June 7, 1936.

shoulders. The Unionist Party made a unanimous choice of Sikandar Hayat Khan as the Premier of Punjab. In the ensuing election to the Legislative Assembly held in 1937 the Party recorded a resounding victory. The Muslim League had to content itself with just one seat, giving Jinnah one more jolt. Yet, Sikandar remained in touch with Jinnah and even enquired about the problems the Muslim League Party had to face in the wake of its humiliation at the hustings.

Sikandar was invited by Jinnah to attend the historic Session of the All India Muslim League at Lucknow in October 1937. A Pact was concluded between the two whose conflicting interpretations later caused much misunderstanding between Khizar Hayat Khan and Jinnah himself. The Pact is reported to have provided:

- (a) That upon his return to Punjab, Sikandar will convene, a special meeting of his party and advise all Muslim members, who are not members of the Muslim League already, to sign the creed and join it. As such, they will be subject to the rules and regulations of the central and provincial Boards of the All India Muslim League. This will not affect the continuance of the coalition Unionist Party.
- (b) That in future elections and by-elections for the Legislature, after the adoption of this agreement, the groups constituting the Unionist Party will jointly support candidates put up by their respective groups;

- (c) That the Muslim members of the Legislature, who are elected on, or accept the League ticket, will constitute the Muslim League Party within the Legislature. It will be open to the Muslim League Party so formed to maintain or enter into coalition or alliance with any other party consistent with the fundamental principles, policy and programme of the League. Such an alliance may be evolved before or after the elections. The existing combination shall maintain its present name, Unionist Party: and
- (d) That in view of the aforesaid agreement, the provincial parliamentary board shall be reconstituted.²

Nothing could be more distressing to the entire Unionist Party than such an agreement, or Pact so called. Chhotu Ram was grievously hurt, but he was wise enough to keep much of it a guarded secret. The Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress rejoiced at such a funny situation.

In reply to Fazl-i-Hussain's letter, Sikandar wrote "I have asked Ahmadyar to convey to Jinnah to live up to his professed views that he wants Muslims to be one united body and to speak with one voice both to the Congress and the British. His activities during the past few weeks, judging from the press reports, are contrary to his professions. I have also asked Ahmadyar to strongly press upon him the advisability of keeping his finger out of the Punjab pie. If he meddles he would only be encouraging fissiparous tendencies already palpably discernible in a section of Punjab Muslims and might burn his fingers; and in any case we cannot possibly allow provincial autonomy to be tampered with in any sphere and

² FH., pp.307-8

by any body, be he a nominee of the powers who have given us this autonomy, or a President of the Muslim League, or any other association or body.”³

Khizar Hayat's Confrontation with Jinnah

Sikandar died in 1942 and he was succeeded by Khizar Hayat Khan as the next Punjab Premier. By this time the demand for the formation of Pakistan had gained momentum, and he was greeted with the slogan ‘Pakistan Zindabad’, ‘Qaid-e-Azam Zindabad’, ‘Khizar Hayat Murdabad’. Even the official circles believed that Jinnah had become ‘more aggressive, more challenging and more authoritative.’ It was also said of him that he was ‘getting rather too big for his boots’. On the other hand, the ranks of the Muslim League were steadily swelling day by day, with young Muslim leaders, like Shaukat Hayat Khan (son of late Sikandar Hayat Khan), Mian Mumtaz Daultana (son of Nawab Ahmadyaar), Nawabzada Iftikhar Hussain of Mamdot (son of Nawab Shah Nawaz Khan), coming forward to take the reigns of the League in their hands. These young leaguers went from town to town, district to district, exhorting the young and the old to be ready to wage a war for the achievement of a Muslim homeland. It was a battle cry ‘do or die’, for it was the long standing demand of Islam activists.

Khizar seems to have lost his wits when he found himself besieged by forces hostile to him. In a letter addressed to Viceroy Wavell, Governor Glancy expressed the apprehension that Khizar was ‘thinking seriously of giving

³ *Ibid.*, pp 309-10

way to Jinnah’s demands’. He was advised against succumbing to Jinnah’s offer to make him the Premier under the Muslim League ministry, for in that position he would be without the forceful support of Chhotu Ram and Baldev Singh, and could, therefore, be thrown out unceremoniously.

Jinnah visited Lahore, this time to talk to Khizar who was once more introduced to the Pact the former had concluded in 1937 and whose provisions allegedly still held good. Jinnah asked Khizar to accord recognition to the historic reality according to which the Unionist Party members were already members of the Muslim League Party. He was only asking Khizar to acknowledge what already existed as the truth. But Khizar had his own logic. His view was that there was nothing like the Sikandar-Jinnah Pact in his knowledge and he could not acknowledge anything having been agreed upon at the historic Lucknow Session. With Khizar not conceding anything Jinnah had talked about, the talks broke down.

Jinnah sent a note to Khizar and wanted a reply to the three points he had raised therein :

- (1) That every member of the Muslim League Party in the Punjab Assembly should declare that he owes his allegiance solely to the Muslim League in the Assembly and not to the Unionist Party or any other party.
- (2) That the present label of the coalition should be dropped, namely, the Unionist Party: and
- (3) That the name of the proposed coalition should be the Muslim League Coalition Party.⁴

⁴ Jami-ud-din Ahmad, *Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah*, vol. 2, p. 42.

Khizar did not reply to the contents of the note and this made Jinnah impolite. Jinnah, during his participation in the Punjab Muslim League Annual Session held at Sialkot, sought to refute the Unionist claim that the Lucknow Pact contained the assurance of non-interference in the affairs of the Party. "Bury this name Unionist. Perform its funeral ceremony" was Jinnah's advice. He went so far as to say that Khizar was a 'mad man'.! Adding "you will regret this the rest of your life".⁵ His rejoinder to Khizar was "You cannot owe allegiance to two political parties. There cannot be divided loyalties, so far as the League is concerned."

With Chhotu Ram at his beck and call, Khizar picked up courage and expressed his full faith in the secular ideals of the Unionist Party. And this was what the non-Muslims of the Province admired most. Both press and public opinion began to work out the dangerous implications of the Muslim League demand for a separate homeland. While for quite a long time Chhotu Ram's was a voice in wilderness, now he emerged as the sole saviour of the Hindus and Sikhs to whom the creation of a communal Pakistan was a distinct reality. Consequently, the entire Western Punjab was plunged into turmoil, resulting in strained relations between the Muslims and non-Muslims. While on the one side the Muslim League enthusiasts cried aloud 'Qaid-e-Azam Zindabad' on the other the Hindus and Sikhs shouted in a subdued voice 'Rahbar-e-Azam Zinadabad', giving rise to apprehension of breach of peace.

⁵ Quoted from KT.' p. 121

Chhotu Ram's Rebuff to Jinnah

During his protracted parleys with Fazl-i-Hussain, Sikandar and Khizar, Jinnah had gathered the impression that the deadlock could not be broken without the involvement of Chhotu Ram in all future talks. With so much of persistence Jinnah had not achieved anything so far, and he wanted to reach a decisive phase where he could ‘break Chhotu Ram’s power.’ It was at Jinnah’s request that Chhotu Ram agreed to meet him and discuss in a free and fair manner the problem that the Muslim League supremo had been raising for over decades. Accordingly, a meeting took place between the two at the Mamdot Villa. What transpired between the two is well brought out by D. C. Verma⁶ who served as the Public Relations Officer to Chhotu Ram. To quote him:

“When they got seated, Jinnah began his monologue emphasizing on Chhotu Ram the wisdom of staying on with the Muslims with whom he had been through out his political life. After all what does it matter, whether the Punjab government carries the Muslim League label or it calls itself Unionist? It is a Muslim majority government. Chhotu Ram remained patient and allowed Jinnah his full say.

“So far as you are concerned”, Jinnah continued, “you will have an assured place in the League cabinet.”

At this point Chhotu Ram joined issue with the Qaid-e-Azam and came out firmly and strongly with what he wanted to tell Jinnah.

“Qaid-e-Azam, you have been thoroughly misinformed about the Punjab situation. There is no question

⁶ CRV.’ pp. 130-31

of any League government in Punjab. The Unionist government is a coalition of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, working on a common agreed programme. Such a government cannot come in the control of anyone community and change its present nomenclature.”

Jinnah was completely surprised as Mamdot and Ghazanfar had given him altogether a different account of the situation. He was expecting Chhotu Ram to be grateful to him for assuring him his present position in the League cabinet. Chhotu Ram now warmed up and spoke to the League leader in his characteristic blunt style.

Chhotu Ram had in mind the dismissal from the cabinet of Shaukat Hayat Khan (son of late Sikandar Hayat Khan) for hobnobbing with the Muslim League leaders, and he made a passing reference to the incident during his talks with Jinnah:

“Not more than a handful of the present Unionist members would change sides, leaving the party strengthened rather than weakened, as the present government would then have strong support from the entire opposition of about 45 members.”

Chhotu Ram’s ‘blunt style’ must have surprised Jinnah more than the subdued voice of Fazl-i-Hussain, Sikandar and Khizar. Even then Jinnah expressed himself in favour of continuing the talks. “I sleep over it and you sleep over it and then we resume discussion later.” The meeting ended with only a negative note.

After a few days there was another telephone call from the Mamdot Villa, and a meeting between Jinnah and Chhotu

Ram took place. The question put to Chhotu Ram was the same as on the earlier occasion: “Are you prepared to be with the Muslim League ministry in your present position and status?” Chhotu Ram had agreed to a second meeting hoping that Jinnah would break some new ground, but when he found Jinnah harping on the old tune, he came out with the emphatic “No, No, Never, Mr. Jinnah.!” Chhotu Ram left the meeting in a huff.

A badly bruised Mr. Jinnah put the matter in this way: “Sir Chhotu Ram was adamant,” and, “insists and maintains that every member of the Muslim League Party in the Assembly owes his primary allegiance to the creed, policy and programme of the so-called Unionist Party and is bound by it. The position taken by him is utterly untenable.”

On being asked how Shaukat Hayat’s dismissal was going to be taken in the League circles, “Chhotu Ram thumped the table before him and said that in politics he who strikes first wins, we have thrown him but and let Mr. Jinnah do his worst now.”

Never before had Jinnah confronted a stronger Unionist armed with the force of law and logic than Chhotu Ram. It became a daily routine with him to indulge in irresponsible insinuations both during public lectures and press statements. It was no one else but Chhotu Ram who became the target of his loose talks, holding him solely responsible for causing obstruction in the way of Pakistan. In public functions held at Lahore, Sialkot and other towns in the Western Punjab he had spoken of the impatience of his Muslim League Party in resorting to force. ‘If no Pakistan, we shall destroy Hindustan’ (agar Pakistan nahin to Hindustan bhi

nahin). The Unionists did take notice of such highly inflammatory slogans and wanted some immediate steps to be taken before it was too late. Unconfirmed reports circulated in Lahore, said that Chhotu Ram had asked Jinnah to leave the Capital within twenty-four hours. The Hindustan Times published a cartoon which showed Chhotu Ram standing on a road crossing and asking Jinnah to take the road to Delhi three hundred miles away.⁷ The very next day, it is said, Jinnah left Lahore for a trip to Kashmir, in pursuance of the order.

Anti-Pakistan Measures

It was Chhotu Ram's firm conviction that economic betterment was the sole antidote to communalism. It is the hungry man who cries out for bread and if it is not made available to him he is ready to do anything to fill his belly. During his short stint of over two years he had done much to make Punjab economically viable, as explained in an earlier chapter.

Early in 1937 Sikandar had launched a six year programme of rural development which focused on establishment of primary and middle schools, primary health centres, veterinary hospitals, improvement of livestock, incentives for cottage industries, establishment of debt conciliation boards, provision of tacavi loans etc.

With the Unionist Party coming to power after the 1937 election, an unprecedented responsibility for the launching of welfare schemes as the measures for countering the Pakistan demand had devolved upon it. The

⁷ H.T., April 28, 1944, CRD., p.93

Hindu Press, which had earlier trained its guns at Chhotu Ram, began to bolster up his image as the only Unionist leader who enjoyed the confidence of the entire rural-urban sections of the society. The Muslim Press was by and large a mouthpiece of the Muslim League.

The Unionist Party decided to have its own Press, for it could be the potent weapon to arrest the growing tide of Muslim League communalism. One was to be a newspaper (daily) in English and the other in Urdu. On its constructive side, the Press was to be the effective medium of disseminating its programmes and policies, particularly those related to development. Chhotu Ram made the *Jat Gazette* more active and responsible in propagating the secular ideology of the Zamindar League. Many of his admirers brought funds for it, and it became financially viable to serve as a spokesman of the peasantry. Chhotu Ram's appeal for collection of funds for the proposed two dailies received wide coverage and within a short period of two months the donations rose above thirty-five lakhs.

No less important was the role of publicizing the Unionist Party's achievements through the public platform. Surprisingly, the Unionist Party was deficient in providing public speakers. Chhotu Ram sought to make good this deficiency by himself undertaking lecture tours in different districts. Premier Khizar issued instructions to the Director of Information Bureau that arrangements be immediately made to send relevant portions of Chhotu Ram's speeches both to the Press and the local Radio Station.

Chhotu Ram asked the Public Relations Department to employ 'bhajniks' who were asked to form their own parties as folk dancers and singers. The Public Relations Department

was also asked to organize a strong team to perform in the Song and Drama Division.

Besides, at various wrestling bouts and fairs arrangements were made to propagate the secular ideology of the Unionist Party. Land was given to members of the Harijan community (kamins), and special funds were earmarked for digging wells for them in villages.

Chhotu Ram was entrusted with the task of introducing on a war footing various legislative measures aimed at resurrecting the peasantry. In fact this is probably the most outstanding contribution of the Unionist Party to the cause of social regeneration. These legislative measures, popularly known as the 'Golden Acts' created a revolution in the agrarian world. These enactments revived peasantry which in course of time attained the proud place of the leading wheat producing province in the country.

It will not be out of place here, however, to recall an interesting case. It was during the Bengal famine that the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, had convened a meeting in New Delhi of provincial Food and Agriculture ministers to work out an arrangement for the imposition of control on the price of wheat at six rupees a maund, Chhotu Ram was the solitary figure to stand up in protest. Asked why he disagreed with the proposal Chhotu Ram quipped : 'I represent a province that is in a position to supply, and I have to think of the peasants, and shall not agree to anything less than ten rupees. If this is not agreed to, I have to hold back the stock.' Every body in the conference room was stunned to hear Chhotu Ram's words. The Viceroy left the conference room, saying "I have no time for arguments." Chhotu Ram also left the conference, saying

that he too had no time to waste. The Viceroy is reported to have recommended Chhotu Ram's immediate dismissal, but the Punjab Governor refused to toe his line, saying that the entire Punjab peasantry would be ablaze in that case.

‘For Pakistan’

The Punjab Muslim League, was almost wholly communalised and prepared to achieve its ultimate goal, Pakistan. To make its power and presence felt even amongst the common ruralite it enlisted the support of pirs who were highly respected and admired in their circles. The Muslim League workers had been allotted mosques and they were instructed to visit them and meet people immediately after the Friday prayers. They raised religious appeals and slogans, and persuaded them to make pledges, with a copy of the Quran before them as witness. With people having been converted to the cause of Pakistan, it was not difficult to collect large sums of money to be spent on propaganda. The Muslim League workers were asked to be present at every important place ‘where some religious ceremony was to be performed, such as on the occasion of taking out tazias. They were advised to join in the prayers along with others, and lead them like ‘Holy Warriors’. Their aim was to make appeals couched in highly emotional tone directly touching their heart and soul. Often fatwas were issued, circulated through the local press and by means of printed leaflets and wall posters. The heightened religious appeals circulated through the loudspeakers of the mosques in the wee hours of morning had their profound impact on the people. The intelligentsia came forward to tell people how Islam had always inspired

people to wage wars on the heretics (kafirs), and undertake crusades against those who had gone out to cause harm to Allah's people.

However, with Chhotu Ram's passing away in January 1945, the Punjab Muslim League found its task made much easier. With no one of his quality and competence in the Unionist Party, Jinnah had no one to challenge his leadership in the Punjab. The *Jat Gazette* which had served as the mouthpiece of Zamindar League could not find a suitable replacement as its patron. There had arisen a vacuum which seemed impossible to fill. The birth of the Muslim homeland was just at a stone's throw now. With the British being in favour of its creation, it became a reality. "The Muslim Jat supporters of the Unionist Party stayed on in their homeland, now called Pakistan, but leaders of those very Hindu and Sikh urbanites, who had opposed Chhotu Ram for a quarter of a century had to flee for life and, ironically enough, take refuge in areas for the development of which Chhotu Ram in the face of bitter hostility of Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs had bent all his energies."⁸ The view is generally shared by many political analysts that no partition of the 'Punjab would have taken place had Chhotu Ram lived a little longer to guide the destiny of the Province.⁹

⁸ SCR. p. 151

⁹ CRC., pp.74, 99.

Amidst His Unionist Colleagues

It had been Chhotu Ram's unswerving conviction since early days that the grievances of the people in rural areas had never been any body's concern. With no sympathetic bureaucracy and no elected representatives around, they felt neglected at almost all levels. They had land which could even be snatched by the cunning moneylenders. There were no other opportunities for employment. It was agriculture which could sustain them in their fight for self-preservation. Generations had lived without education, for in a vocation like tilling the land it had absolutely no place and no role.

It was, indeed, nothing short of a miracle that Chhotu Ram received education up to graduate level and became a lawyer, a position which no one in the entire Rohtak District had attained before, and later as a Minister, a status which no one in his community had achieved before. There were others who reached this status, but no one shone on the political horizons as brightly as he did.

Chhotu Ram had no political ambitions for mere satisfaction of his ego. He was often reminded of a human cause for which he thought he had taken birth in a peasant family. He had started espousing this cause when he came in

direct confrontation with the woes of the poor, helpless peasants, exposed to exploitation at the hands of greedy, dishonest moneylenders. He could not resist the urge to contest the 1920 election to the first Reformed Council. But defeat was not his extinction. In the unsolicited respite from the political drudgery for three years, he studiously went through all agrarian records and laws and acquainted himself with all that was unfair in them. If at all there is anything which the Unionist Party can justifiably be proud of, it is Chhotu Ram's 'Golden Acts' which brought about a revolution in the rural world.

Chhotu Ram and Fazl-i-Hussain

Much before Chhotu Ram shared the political platform with Fazl-i-Hussain in 1923, the latter had been in close touch with Jinnah. With no political organization before him with which he could associate himself in some responsible capacity, he had leaned heavily towards the Muslim League Party. Jinnah's searching eyes fell upon him and both came fairly close to each other, some times through correspondence and some times through personal meetings. Now, Fazl-i-Hussain's cause became Jinnah's own cause. The friendship grew thicker with the passage of time, so much so that the former volunteered to help the latter in organizing the Lahore Session of the All India Muslim League in 1924. The comitment to friendship was repeated by Fazl-i-Hussain when he wrote to Jinnah: "India, and in particular Muslim India, cannot afford to lose you, Men of clear vision, independent judgment and strength of character are very few, and when one sees efforts made in non-Muslim quarters not to help genuinely Muslim

India with a view secure to their cooperation, but simply to persuade the Muslim community to entrust its future to them, the need for a strong man of independent judgment, integrity and strength of character becomes apparent and overwhelmingly great. At such crises, it is only men of very outstanding ability, like you, who can guide the community, and that is why I was very pleased when I found you had given your assent to organize the League under your leadership.”¹

It is interesting to note here that what Fazl-i-Hussain wrote was to repay the words of praise showered upon him lavishly on many previous occasions. In fact, Fazl-i-Hussain was seriously thinking of grabbing the presidentship of the Muslims and did not like Jinnah from the core of his heart. Jinnah’s disillusionment came when he found Fazl-i-Hussain turning a deaf ear to his request to contest the 1936-37 provincial election on the League ticket. He had never liked Jinnah as a trusted and tried friend — ‘his politics, his popularity, his impeccable logic, and his dialectics’. Jinnah had a bitter taste when Fazl-i-Hussain gave him a cold shoulder treatment. ‘I shall never come to Punjab, it is such a hopeless place.’ It was Fazl-i-Hussain’s startling revelation that those who had fathered the idea (of Pakistan) in the early thirties had been financed by British intelligence in London.²

Fazl-i-Hussain was deeply pained when he learnt of a feud between Chhotu Ram and Lal Chand in 1926. Lal Chand had intended to start what he called ‘Liberal League’ as parallel to Chhotu Ram’s Zamindar League. “Special attention was ‘paid to those constituencies where a contest was likely to damage

¹ *Sharif-ud-din Pirzada, Qaid-i-Azam’s Correspondence*, p. 92

² *Durga Das, India from Curzon to Nehru and After*, p. 169

the interests of the Party as a whole. In Rohtak, for example, a contest between Chaudhri Lal Chand and Chaudhri Chhotu Ram would have been fatal to the unity of the rural Hindus in the South-East Punjab. Chaudhri Lal Chand was already negotiating with the Hindu Sabha, and a split seemed imminent. Fazl-i-Hussain intervened and convinced Chaudhri Lal Chand that, but for the unity and strength of the Party, the Punjab would fall behind Congress Provinces in self-respect and progress, and he agreed to withdraw in favour of Chaudhri Chhotu Ram on the understanding that he would be helped by Chaudhri Chhotu Ram to become chairman of the Rohtak District Board.”³

Fazl-i-Hussain was upset when he had to face what he called ‘Hindu campaign against him’. “I resent this campaign because it has been widening the gulf between the communities and thus retarding the political progress of the province, and perhaps of the country as a whole. The Muslims might have been helped sympathetically and peacefully to come into their own, which they were bound to do in any case ... I also resent this so-called Hindu campaign because it is now directed, in effect, against the backward sections of the Hindu community itself. The fight against me on communal grounds is only a trick, a tactical method of deceiving the world. The fight is now really against Chaudhary Chhotu Ram as representing the revolt of the Hindu masses against the dominance of a handful of self-seekers. The authors of the campaign are really trying to suppress him and the cause which he represents. But their efforts are foredoomed to failure.”⁴

³ FH, pp. 341-42

⁴ FH., pp. 337-38

It will perhaps be no exaggeration to say that Fazl-i-Hussain liked Chhotu Ram for his sterling qualities more, than any other Unionist. Says Azim Hussain, the biographer-son of Fazl-i-Hussain: “The only person who held aloft the banner of the Unionist Party in the absence of Fazl-i-Hussain was Chhotu Ram, the leader of the party since 1926”, Fazl-i-Hussain wrote in his diary, “Saw Chhotu Ram. He is hardworking, intelligent, and clear-headed, distinctly and considerably above the average. If my health permits my forming a ministry under the Reforms, it will not be without Chhotu Ram. We had a very satisfactory talk. I wish Feroz were possessed of even half the qualifications which distinguish Chhotu Ram from others.”⁵

Chhotu Ram and Sikandar Hayat Khan

If there is anything special about Sikandar it is the controversial Pact which he finalized with Jinnah at the historic Lucknow Session of the Muslim League Party. Much of the significance of this Pact we have discussed in some detail in the preceding chapter, and what now remains to be seen is how the Muslim historians have sought to interpret it. “Sikandar” says Khaliqzaman, “saved Muslim India by coming to the League session in Lucknow and infusing life into the organization. His association with the Muslim League at this crucial hour in the fate of Muslim India is the event in history and must live for ever to remind us of his greatness”⁶

⁵ FH., pp. 278-79

⁶ Khaliqzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan*, p. 290. Some historians hold that Raja Ghazamfar Ali Khan beguiled Sikandar into signing the Pact, SFH., pp. 190-92.

He further writes, "it is a great tragedy that the great leader, Sir Sikandar, is now remembered only as Unionist and as opposed to League ideals, but for his support to the League cause even Pakistan resolution would not have been passed at Lahore. All his services to the cause of the Muslims of the Subcontinent seem to be forgotten, but I hope that Pakistan will acclaim him some day as one of the greatest men coming from the land of five rivers."⁶ For Chhotu Ram, it was certainly a surrender to Jinnah. In a letter to Jinnah, Sikandar remorsefully wrote: "You will remember I informed you that our opponents will do their best to distort and misinterpret the agreement with a view to embarrass us and in particular make Chaudhary Sir Chhotu Ram's position difficult and even untenable."⁷ Elsewhere Sikandar said, "The All India Muslim League Resolution of 1940 is the sheet anchor of the Muslims in the Punjab and elsewhere. The Muslims of the Punjab must have the right of self-determination."⁸

It was Chhotu Ram's 61 st birthday that was celebrated on March 1, 1942 at the Jat High School ground, amidst many prominent personalities. Sikandar Hayat Khan, the Punjab Premier, was the chief guest. We reproduce here succinctly some of his observations and anecdotes about Chhotu Ram.

"From the core of my heart", Sikandar said, "I pray to the Almighty to grant Sir Chhotu Ram a long life and progressive upgradation in his courage so that this true well-wisher of peasant in the advancing years of his age may guide and supervise with great vigour this vibrant, yet less eloquent region, which owing to its sacrifice, selfless patriotism has

⁷ Khaliqzaman, *op, cit.*,

⁸ M.H. Saiyed, *Mohamad Ali Jinnah*, pp 519-20

been appropriately called the sword-arm of the Indian Empire.”

Continuing his praise for his colleague on the eve of diamond jubilee celebration, Sikandar said:

“Sir Chhotu Ram is among those rare souls who appear once after long decades to start a new era and inaugurate a new age.”

“What Chhotu Ram has done in a short period for the benefit of the people will be remembered for ever. In his own times he has done so much that the Punjab will need no other leader for centuries to come.”

And, “I salute the great land that produced a mighty leader and a great man like Chhotu Ram.”

Chhotu Ram and Khizar Hayat Khan

Chhotu Ram was at Rohtak when he received the tragic news of Sikandar’s demise. Immediately, he set out for Lahore to take part in the funeral rites and be personally available to hold consultations with his colleagues about the next incumbent.

The Viceroy wrote to the Punjab Governor to enquire about the prospective incumbent for the vacant office. The Governor suggested Chhotu Ram that, since he happened to be the senior most in the Party it was his right to succeed the late Sikandar Hayat Khan. Chhotu Ram saw clearly through the British game, and wrote back to say that the choice of a successor was the internal matter of the Party, and that he had

nothing to say at the moment. The Party left the choice of next incumbent to Chhotu Ram himself who was quite clear in his mind as to what was in the best interest of the Party and the Province. With consultations having been held with Party members, he came out 'with Khizar's name as the most suitable candidate to head the Unionist Government in the present circumstances.' No one could reasonably question Chhotu Ram's statesmanship, for in a political party like the Unionist Party only a Muslim could maintain his hold for all times. His announcement was hailed as truly reflective of his long mature experience and sagacity, backed by loud shouts of 'Unionist Party Zindabad, 'Chhotu Ram Zindabad', 'Khizar Hayat Zindabad'. None spoke in protest, none put forward his claim, none threatened to quit the Party. This was the unique place Chhotu Ram occupied in a predominantly Muslim organization, and that was why the communal designs of Jinnah miserably failed. If there was jubilation in the Unionist camp, there was gloom in the Congress, Muslim League, and Hindu Mahasabha. Most adversaries of Chhotu Ram were now compelled to change their opinion about his way of working as a true parliamentarian. Chhotu Ram was well aware of Khizar's proximity with Jinnah, and also of his ambition to become a 'suitable substitute' to him, but now it was the time to match up to him and exercise his own discretion. He was expelled from the Muslim League with a vengeance, and this is the price he had to pay for his getting into the 'blind alley'. Chhotu Ram, whom Khizar called 'chacha' (uncle), saved him from many embarrassing situations. Khizar had drawn Shaukat Hayat close to him, hoping that he would help him in overcoming Jinnah's

communal overtones. From sheer respect for the late Sikandar, Chhotu Ram got him inducted into the cabinet. But he continued to hobnob with Jinnah and divulged to him all secrets of the Government. Chhotu Ram got the ‘agent provocateur’ dismissed at once. This served as a deterrent to others and the Party continued on its onward path of peace and prosperity. However, Chhotu Ram left the mortal world in January 1945 and with his death the process of the Unionist Party’s decline and decay set in. ‘Not only an illustrious son of the Punjab and a valued colleague, I mourn above all else the loss of a cherished friend whose unfailing kindness and support I can never forget or replace.’ Khizar continued sobbing inconsolably till the dead body was completely consumed by the high rising flames at the Jat High School ground in Rohtak.

Khizar paid his tributes to the departed Leader in these words:

“His work was such that his ability and zeal and enthusiasm won him the recognition of all those who came in contact with him. He made his voice felt in the wider provincial field and he was soon found to be the popular defender of the rights of the zamindars. He was the co-founder of the Unionist Party with the late lamented Sir Fazl-i-Hussain and worked as his first lieutenant and righthand man till Mian Saheb left to join the Central Government. Sir Chhotu Ram then became the *de facto* and *de jure* leader of the Unionist Party for a long time in the old Legislative Council. If I am not wrong, his stand for his ideals was so strong that at one time he had only one Hindu follower left. But still he stuck to his guns and he

had the unique distinction of being the only Hindu leading a party with a majority of Muslims. Before he was returned to power in 1936 it is well known that he could have been the leader of certain other sections which were ready to have him as their leader. But he said, "No, I will not have anything to do either with the ministership or leadership." The part he played in getting the agrarian legislation through in this House is well known. Nor could I fail to mention what he did under these difficult circumstances for communal harmony. His work for the uplift of the poor will never be forgotten and it is well known that he travelled day and night, motoring hundreds of miles to see the poor and redress their grievances. It was that, I think, which mostly affected his health. Doctors advised him to take rest, but he could not. He went on making journeys, all in the interest of the cause so dear to his heart and in the interest of the poor. He saved nothing as is well known to all. His eloquence was such that thousands came to hear him from great distances, walking on foot. He lectured for hours and kept the audience spell bound.

He was a statesman with a dynamic personality. His contribution to the life of the Province will be long remembered. He has passed away but the ideals and the work he has done shall remain for ever. In him the Province has lost a great Punjabi and myself a personal friend. His loss is all the greater now when his constructive brain was needed for the service of his country. Further generations of Punjabis will always remember the life, work and the services by the late Sir Chhotu Ram to the cause of the Punjab."⁹

⁹ Bhai Nahar Singh, *Sir Chhotu Ram Souvenir*, Maharaja Suraj Mal Memorial Education Society (1990), pp. 49-58. Reproduced in CRSW, pp. 304-5

Chhotu Ram and Mohammad Iqbal

Mohammad Iqbal (1877-1938), a poet-philosopher of repute, was a member of the Punjab Legislative Council from 1926 to 1930. For quite some time he was a Unionist and fairly close to Fazl-i-Hussain and Chhotu Ram. He quit the Unionist Party and was made president of Muslim League in 1930. Chhotu Ram was close to Ahmadyar Khan Daultana and developed interest in Iqbal's poetry that could be used to wake up the slumbering peasantry from their exploitation at the hands of the village moneylenders. We reproduce here a few couplets which Chhotu Ram often recited during his lectures and speeches to the rural audience and explained their significance in simple Urdu.

*Khuda ke bande to hain hazaron,
banon mein phirte mare mare,
Mein uska banda banoonga jisko
Khuda ke bandon se pyar hoga.*

(Thousands of God's worshipecers aimlessly wander about in the woods, I shall worship him who loves God's people alone.)

*Yahi aiyene kudrat hai, yahi asloobe fitrat hai,
Jo hai rahe amal mein gamzan mehboobe fitrat hai.*

(It is the law of Nature and it is its characteristic that those who follow the path of action are dear to it.)

*Kyon griftaelisme hech midkari hai tu,
Dekh to poshida tujh mein shaukatai tufan bhi hai.*

(Why are thou the victim of faintheartedness? Look within, thou hast the might of a storm hidden in thee.)

*Yakeen mohkam amal peham mohabbat fathe alam,
Jihade zindagani me in heh hai mardon ki shamsheren.*

(Firm faith, ceaseless action and all-conquering love are the true weapons of warriors in the battle of life.)

Some of these couplets Chhotu Ram used in writing his articles on “Bechara Zamindar”, published in various serial articles in the *Jat Gazette*.

Happily enough, such couplets worked wonders with the peasantry, and in a short time the peasants fully exhibited the deep impact they had made upon their minds. Chhotu Ram in the initial stages encountered a peasantry woefully undisciplined, given to loose talk and a deep dose of fatalism, but in course of time he found them changed and they displayed a remarkable sense of unity and brotherhood which gave them respect and honour in the society.

The 'Golden Acts' : Resurrecting the Peasantry

The unprecedented communal storm unleashed by the Muslim League in 1946 in the Punjab swept away everything of the Unionist Party, but not the Golden Acts which the grateful Zamindars have since cherished as their pride and pleasure. Though not much is heard today of the Unionist Party, Chhotu Ram's name is still on the lips of every peasant who readily ascribes his present prosperity to him as the author behind these Acts. There was rumblings in the air which suggest how he not only pulled the helpless peasants out of the moneylenders' humiliating servitude but also put them on the right track through his writings in the *Jat Gazette*, speeches from public platforms and enactments in the Legislature. In the present chapter we are concerned with those Acts that are related to the peasantry in one way or another.

The Punjab Regulation of Accounts Act (1930)

Surprisingly enough, for generations the moneylenders in Punjab, as perhaps in other provinces, had been enjoying almost absolute impunity from any administrative or legislative control over their activity. However, with the advent of the Unionist Party in 1923 acrimonious debates were often heard in the Legislature which gradually paved the way for

various acts. The elected representatives from rural areas took up the various objectionable activities of the moneylenders and were successful in bringing about a discernible change in the plight of the peasants. The cunning moneylenders manipulated the accounts in any way they liked and cheated the illiterate, simple zamindars. Hence the need for a meaningful legislation.

The act enjoined upon the creditor the following procedure to follow :-

- i. To maintain his account-book (bahi) properly in legible hand.
- ii. To make the updated account -books available for inspection after every six months.
- iii. To furnish details about the amount loaned, with addresses of those who had taken the debt.
- iv. Information about the rate of interest to be charged on the amount.
- v. Statement about the period for which money has been loaned.
- vi. Details about the person/persons who have stood surety, if any.
- vii. Furnishing information about defaulters in the matter of repayment.
- viii. Decrees got issued from a court of law, if any.
- ix. Warning given, if any for poor or casual maintenance of the account books.
- x. Whether the records of payment/repayments have been checked regularly.

- xi. Information in regard to any fine or penalty imposed, if any.
- xii. Any point to be mentioned specially.

The Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act (1934)

With over forty thousand moneylenders in Punjab by 1935, it could well be imagined how serious, the incidence of indebtedness was at that time. In an earlier chapter we have seen that, while in 1921 the total agricultural debt was around Rs. 90 crores, in 1929 it rose to 135 crores rupees, showing an increase of 50 percent. A little later, in 1932, the total debt was approximately 200 crores rupees. If we calculate the total amount of interest payable at the minimum rate of 1 percent per mensem, it will come to Rs. 24 crores. Obviously, this means an annual recurring burden of 24 crores of rupees to be borne by the agricultural classes of the province by way of interest alone.

Now, there arose three main questions for the legislators to answer, and find out appropriate solutions to them.

- I. Why such a huge accumulation of indebtedness?
- II. What should be done to reduce the burden as much as possible?
- III. What preventive measures should be taken to arrest the galloping speed of indebtedness?

Let's listen to Chhotu Ram in regard to the first question.

“However, I may inform the honourable members that in enacting them (acts) we have had a conscious desire that the credit of zamindars should be restricted, because up till now the greatest known enemy of the zamindar has been his excessive credit. It has been pointed out by Sir Malcolm Darling in his famous book so frequently quoted by my honourable friends opposite that so long as the excessive credit enjoyed by the zamindar remains unabated, no body can save him from the evil of indebtedness. Consequently, while it is correct to say that the credit of the zamindar has been restricted to some extent, even to a substantial extent it could be denied that this restriction will only help in rescuing the zamindar from the clutches of the moneylender who has been sucking his blood for generations.”¹

An honourable member of the House, Chaudhary Krishan Gopal Dutt, who had his own solution, perhaps the one that has found favour with our present Congress Government, enquired of the Minister for Development, Chhotu Ram, “why the Government did not payoff all the debts of zamindars out of its own exchequer and thus relieve the poor debtors for ever”. The honourable member added that “this method has been adopted by some countries.”

To this viewpoint, Chhotu Ram did not agree. “I do not know whether this has been done in other countries or not, but of this much I am certain that it cannot be done in Punjab. There are good many practical difficulties that stand in the way of such a course. For instance, once the moneylenders are given to understand that the Government intends to payoff all debts, they will lose no time in

¹ PLA, vol. xi., p.617, 1940.

fraudulently showing a debt of, say Rs. 100 as that of Rs. 1000. Moreover, the revenue out of which these debts will be paid have been almost exclusively contributed by the zamindars themselves, which means that their own money will be used in paying off their debts, and the burden would fall on those very people whom the Government wants to relieve. Again, if the provincial exchequer is burdened to that extent, the next difficulty which Government would have to face is that they would have to stop their road programme, close down schools and hospitals, reduce the strength of the police and retrench many other departments. But the administrative requirements will force the Government to impose new taxes which under the present fiscal structural would again have to be levied on the zamindars. You probably remember, Sir, that in 1924, by a single executive order the burden of *abiana* on the zamindars was increased by Rs. 75 lakhs. But if, on the other hand, a single price is levied by way of tax, on my honourable friends opposite, it has to be done by legislation which will give rise to a storm of agitation throughout the province in which the opposition leads.”²

The opposition benches referred often to the role of cooperative societies in relieving the peasants and others of their continued indebtedness. Under the Relief of Indebtedness Act (Amendment), interest of 7.5 percent per annum for secured loans and of 12.5 per cent per annum for unsecured loans was allowed. But the zamindars could not make use of the societies, because (1) not enough budgeting allocations were made, and (2) in the absence of proper supervision, the managerial staff was not sincere in promoting and protecting

² *Ibid.*

the aims and objectives of these societies. A prominent member of the Assembly asserted on the floor of the House: “the impartial students of cooperative movement in this province are, in my opinion, unanimously of the opinion that the cooperative movement in this province has been a signal failure,”³ But the Minister concerned had a different opinion. To quote him here: “I submit that their object is very laudable. It is to provide⁴ facilities to zamindars in taking loans at a very reasonable rate of interest. It is only these societies which protect zamindars from paying unreasonable interest to moneylenders. Besides, the management of the cooperative societies is in the hands of the zamindars and their representatives.”

By another innovative amendment, Debt Conciliation Boards were given more powers. They now hand the judicial authority to decide cases upto the value of ten thousand rupees. The problem with the illiterate peasant was that he never knew how much he had to pay to the moneylender, both in terms of the original amount as also in terms of interest thereon. The moneylender did not disclose such details, keeping his ‘asami’ in the dark. This was one simple way whereby the creditors kept their debtors in perpetual bondage. Therefore, in order to enable the debtors to seek the help of Government in such matters, Debt Conciliation Boards were set up, first on experimental basis in selected districts, such as Kamal, Amritsar and Hoshiarpur. The scheme was later found to be useful for the purpose for which it was devised and extended to cover all districts of Punjab.

³ PLA. vol. xi-A., p. 775 (1940)

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. xi-A., p. 775 (1940)

A debtor, generally a peasant, could now approach a Conciliation Board just by fixing an eight -ana judicial stamp on a piece of paper and could obtain knowledge about the latest position regarding the actual amount of the debt standing in his name. One of the salient features of these Boards was the role they often played in securing an amicable settlement between the moneylender and his debtor. These Boards, with their sympathetic attitudes towards the afflicted debtors, became popular and produced wonderful results. Another notable feature about the creation of these Boards was the moneylender's inability to tamper with the accounts in his bahi.

One serious matter which the House took up in connection with the Relief of Indebtedness Act concerned the arrest of the judgement debtor. After long deliberations, the Minister concerned came out with an amendment which was accreted by the House as a whole. The amendment read:

“Now, Sir, I would like to draw your attention to Section 34 of the Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act of 1934 which runs as follows:-

“Notwithstanding anything contrary contained in any other law for the time being in force, no judgement debtor shall be liable to arrest for default in the payment of any money due under a decree, unless the court is satisfied that the judgement-debtor has, without just cause consciously refused to pay the amount of the decree, in whole or in part, within his capacity to make payment.”⁵ By an Amendment, it was now accepted that the debtor would not be arrested just because of default in payment.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 854, 31st, March to 24th April, 1939

The Minister for Development, “Here is my honourable friend, representative of a rural constituency. He wants to know if I would support an amendment moved to abolish imprisonment for non-payment of land revenue. But he should not be restive. He should consider dispassionately that there is a distinction between various kinds of lapses which lead to penalties. For instance, I am sure that he would wish to continue to imprison people for theft, robbery or cheating. To award a sentence of imprisonment is barbarous in every case. What I meant to convey was that imprisonment for default in payment of a debt is a relic of barbarity. But so far as land revenue is concerned it is not on the same footing as a debt. It is a tax.”⁶

Accordingly, the act prohibited the arrest and imprisonment of debtors in the execution of decrees for money. It made room for immunity from attachment or sale of houses, milch cattle or even the agricultural implements. The definition of ‘agriculturist’ was made clearer by the statement that an agriculturalist was one who depended for his livelihood mainly on agriculture or income from land whether in the capacity of an owner, tenant, partner or even agricultural labourer.⁷

But there was hue and cry in the House over the provision in the Act which treated all zamindars, big or small, as equal in claiming exemption from arrest. A member stood up to say: “It is just and proper to afford, all sort of relief to poor agriculturists, but I cannot understand as to why such concessions should be given to those rich people who in reality do not stand in need of them.”⁸ Chhotu Ram did not agree

⁶ PLA, vol. IX, From March 31st to 24th April, 1939

⁷ PLA, vol. X, p. 1630.

⁸ PLA, ix, pp. 834-37

with this view. In his view it was not wrong if one big zamindar also benefitted from the concession along with thousands of small agriculturists, particularly when the small and the big zamindars were after all members of the same vocation.⁹

The Punjab Debtors' Protection Act (1936)

The Act drafted and piloted by non-official member of the Council, Chhotu Ram, on March, 31, 1936 was, to all intents and purposes, a 'corollary to the Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act', and was passed on April 16, 1936. While introducing the Bill in the Council, Chhotu Ram sought to put the matter thus: "The first consideration which we should keep constantly before our mind's eye is that the population of Punjab is 23.5 millions out of which 90 per cent is in debt which means 21,00,000 people. As against the interests of this overwhelming section of Punjab population are pitted against the interests of just 40,000 moneylenders. Let us not forget that. The main --- in fact, the most important --- question before the House is whether the interests of over 2 crores of people are to be safeguarded or the interests of this large number are to be sacrificed for the interests of just 40,000 of sahkars".¹⁰

The report of the select committee was incorporated by Chhotu Ram in his final draft. The Act in its final shape contained the following points:

- i. Land belonging to a statutory agriculturist could not be sold in execution of a decree even after he has declared to be an insolvent.

⁹ PLA, vol. xiii, p. 283

¹⁰ PLC, Nov., 1935, p. 1012

- ii. The period of Mustajiri could in no case exceed 20 years.
- iii. Houses and other dwellings and sites appurtenant thereto could not be attached and sold, unless they were proved to have been lying vacant for more than a year.
- iv. If an application was made to a Conciliation Board for the settlement of a debtor's family and plough-cattle must be exempted from attachment.
- v. Enough gain for seed and subsistence, until the next harvest comes round, of a judgement-debtor's family and plough-cattle must be exempted from attachment.
- vi. In the case of an artisan, his tools are immune from attachment.
- vii. A judgement-debtor could not be arrested unless it was proved that (a) he has capacity to pay (b) he has refused to pay (c) the refusal to pay is without just and sufficient cause; and (d) the refusal to pay is contumacious.

In judging a debtor's capacity to pay the value of all property exempt from attachment and also the Mustajiri of land shall have to be excluded from calculation.
- viii. All the proceedings relating to Mustajiri shall take place before the Collector instead of civil courts.
- ix. When dealing with the Mustajiri of land, the Collector shall reserve from alienation sufficient amount of land for maintenance of the judgement-debtor or his family.

- x. Standing crops, other than sugarcane and cotton, shall not be liable to attachment. Trees standing or lands belonging to a statutory agriculturalist shall also be exempt from attachment.
- xi. In the case of a debtor as defined in section 7 of the Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act the period of Limitation of the execution of a decree shall be 6 years instead of 12.
- xii. Ancestral immovable property in the hands of a subsequent holder shall not be liable to attachment for any debts incurred after the Punjab Debtors' Protection Act comes into force. Even in the case of debts incurred before the commencement of this Act, ancestral immovable property in the hands of a subsequent holder shall be liable to attachment only if a special custom allowing such attachment is proved in accordance with very strict stands of evidence.

If the debtor finds himself in such a state of economic helplessness that he honestly feels that there is no prospect of his being able to pay his debt, he can resort to one of the two following ways:-

- (a) He can go to an Insolvency Court and get himself declared an insolvent. Under the Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act a summary and comparatively inexpensive procedure has been provided for the purpose of declaring a person as insolvent by the amendment of the provincial insolvency Act. The scope of this summary and inexpensive procedure has been extended so as to include all persons, whose debts were 200 rupees or above, and the value of whose property

does not exceed 2000 rupees. Formerly only those persons could take advantage of a summary procedure of insolvency whose debts amounted to not less than 500 rupees and whose property was not likely to exceed 500 rupees in value.

- (b) He could go to a Conciliation Board for the settlement of his debts. Before the passing of the Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act a debtor could not go before a court of justice unless he had been summoned in consequence of a suit filed by a creditor. This meant that a debtor could go to a court only in response to a summons from it. Now he could go before a Conciliation Board for the settlement of all claims against him. He had to pay a court fee of eight annas on his application for this purpose.

Chhotu Ram concludes “But, while it is perfectly legitimate to take advantage of all protection afforded by the law, it must be remembered that it is the moral duty of each debtors to repay his debts to the best of his ability. It is true that the artificially inflated credit of the agriculturalist has proved his ruin in the past, yet it should not be forgotten that credit is a good thing in itself and everything within the power of the debtor should be done to maintain it. One of the best means of maintaining credit is for a debtors to pay his just debts. Again, non-payment of debts, while a debtor is really capable of repaying them, produces a great demoralizing effect on his character while it must be avoided by all means within his power.”¹¹

¹¹ Ch. Chhotu Ram’s paper, Indebtedness in the Punjab, 1935.

Enactments during the Unionist party in Power

The electoral battle fought under the Provincial Autonomy Act of 1935, and won by the Unionist Party by an impressive majority was an unprecedented event in the political landscape of the Punjab. Primarily, the credit went to Chhotu Ram, but he was wise enough to help Sikandar Hayat Khan occupy the seat of power, and both pledged to have a strong and stable ministry in the province. Both also were alive to the possible threat to the smooth functioning of the ministry from a visible formidable opposition. Sikandar took the oath of secrecy in April 1937 as the Premier for the second time. The cabinet consisted of three others from his own Party, two from two opposition parties, bringing the total strength to six.

1. Sikandar Hayat Khan : General administration of Law and Order
2. Chhotu Ram : Development
3. Khizar Hayat Khan : Public Works and local Self-Government
4. Abdul Hayi : Education, Irrigation and Excise.
5. S.S. Majithia : Revenue, Irrigation and Excise
6. Manohar Lal : Finance

S.S. Majithia belonged to the Khalsa National Party, while Manohar Lal represented the National Progressive Party. Raja Narendra Nath, who played an important part in the formation of the cabinet, was happy that even some people from outside the Unionist Party had been given a place in it. It was now a coalition Government, and all hoped that it would work for the welfare of the people of the Province.

The Punjab Registration of Moneylenders Act (1938)

If at all there was anyone in the world who deserved all our help and sympathy it was the poor peasant, and if there was anyone who deserved all our condemnation and rebuke it was the cunning moneylender. Money-lending has always been a respectable business in the civilized countries, and rests on the noble motto: Love thy neighbour as thy self. As the number of poor peasants continued to rise abnormally, correspondingly there was increase in the number of moneylenders. For recovering their money, they resorted to all means, fair or foul, so that the Government of the day had to wake up to the deteriorating social order. As philosopher Nietzsche said, "Life is a well of delight, but when the rabble also drink, all fountains are poisoned," A noble institution had gradually degenerated when it fell into the hands of those greedy, unscrupulous elements who adopted all tricks and tactics to recover their dues.

In 1937 the Unionist Party came into power, and Chhotu Ram now had the conducive atmosphere to push through all those Acts that could possibly remedy the situation. The two Acts passed earlier —the Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act and the Punjab Debtors' Protection Act— contained loopholes and did not appear effective enough to come to the peasant's rescue. The Debtors Protection Act, passed in a hurry, showed itself in its 'mutilated form'. The 1938 Registration of Moneylenders Act promised to come up to Chhotu Ram's expectation. Once again the Moneylender was on his hit list. He was fully determined to see that the shearer was not in a position "to take off the sheep's skin with the wool".

The act had the following provisions:

- i. That all moneylenders, agriculturists or non-agriculturists, should get themselves registered, except those landlords who lent money to their tenants for husbandry?
- ii. All eligible moneylenders must get licenses for practicing their profession, by making the prescribed fee.
- iii. The Act stipulated that suits and applications for execution of decrees were liable to be dismissed if the moneylender was not registered.
- iv. The same applied to the moneylenders if they had not obtained a license.
- v. The registration and license could be cancelled for reasons clearly stated in Section 6 of the Act.

The Act brought much relief to those peasants who were not in a position to repay their debts because of their crops having been damaged or destroyed by natural calamities. Nor could the moneylenders approach the court and get the decree.

The Banking Inquiry Committee had put the number of moneylenders at 55,000, and it was expected that at least 50 to 60 per cent of them went for compliance of the law. The moneylenders were now in a fix as to how they should carry on their business. It was not at all easy to obtain decrees. Now, the moneylenders sought to evolve a relationship of mutual partnership in the game. They even lowered the rate of interest, albeit marginally, and with greater confidence in their debtors, they decided to carry out their business as usual. The

cooperative societies did not attract them, for they were never treated well and much delay was caused in providing loans. The zamindars thought it still convenient to go to their moneylender's house and get a prompt payment of the debt. It is on record that only the licenses of five moneylenders were cancelled for default in the whole of Punjab, while three of them succeeded in getting back their licenses.

The Punjab Restitution of Mortgaged Lands Act (1938)

Needless to say, most moneylenders took care to see that the loan advanced was secure. There could be nothing more secure if the loan was given to those who came to them with the offer for mortgaging their lands. It was also a fact that in about 20 per cent cases the peasant agreed to hand over the mortgaged land to the creditor after a bargain had been struck between the two. Accordingly, the moneylenders were able to be owners of hundreds of bighas of land. Gradually, they became big landlords, but all this was against the interests of peasantry. The Restitution of Mortgaged Lands Act aimed at removing this serious anomaly.

But the Act was not foolproof. It exempted landlords who provided money to their tenants for purposes of husbandry. Most moneylenders declared themselves landlords and began to advance loans to those who were prepared to call themselves tenants. Although benami transactions had been declared illegal, they were back again in another form. That is why quite a large number of moneylenders did not get themselves registered as such. They continued to call themselves agriculturists, so as to enjoy all those benefits that were allowed under the Act.

The Act provided for the restitution of those lands that had been mortgaged before June, 8, 1901, free of cost, to the rightful owners. The Act benefited 3.65 lakh mortgagees, and immediately took possession of 8.35 acres of land which had been mortgaged for a mere 4.13 lakhs. The Government created a land reclamation unit for the purpose. It was a laudable attempt to revive peasantry in the entire province.

Some members of the Council opposed to Chhotu Ram's agrarian laws, approached Governor Geoffrey de Montmorency and requested him to use his good offices in crying halt to all such legislations. The Governor consented to the request and wanted some top Unionist to meet him. Not much heed was paid to the Governor's invitation. After some time the meeting took place and the Governor wanted Chhotu Ram to slow down his speed in effecting the agrarian enactments. It was rumoured that the Governor could possibly withhold assent to the passed bills. Chhotu Ram later said that, if he had the power not to accord consent to the bills the Unionist Party had the power to see the bills through. When the pace of legislation continued forward, some opposition members launched a campaign of a calumny and threatened to approach the court to get these Acts declared illegal. Chhotu Ram, himself a legal genius retorted by saying that, if the Federal Court, ruled that the provincial Government had no power to enact such laws, he would resign as Minister and also as member of the Council. But Chhotu Ram went ahead undaunted.

The Punjab Agricultural Produce Marketing Act (1939)

Chhotu Ram defines the nature and objective of the Bill as "seeking to regulate the methods and practices obtaining

in the markets and is intended to overhaul the marketing systems.”

Chhotu Ram continued: “I may now draw the attention of the House to some of the important matters which are covered by the present Bill.”

This Bill empowers the provincial Government to declare, by notification, the areas in which and the agricultural produce in respect of which they propose to exercise control in the matter of sale and purchase of agricultural commodities. After the issue of such notification, the purchase and sale of the particular agricultural produce, specified in the notification, can only be carried on by businessmen licenses in area to which that notification applies.

Then under this Bill, provision has been made for the establishment of market committees with certain powers and duties. One of the powers of these market committees will be to regulate business and to pay certain fees in respect of transactions of sale and purchase that take place in the notified area. The proceeds of these fees will be put into a fund which will be known as the Market Committee Fund. The Bill further provides for that particular purchase the money in the fund can be expended. Apart from salaries paid to officers, who may be appointed by the market committees, the following are the objects on which this fund can be expended:¹²

1. The maintenance and improvement of the market.
2. The construction and repair of buildings which are necessary for the purpose of such markets and for the

¹² PLA, vol. v, 20th June, 22nd July, 1935

- health, convenience and safety of the persons using it.
3. The provisions and maintenance of standard weights and measures.
 4. The collection and dissemination of information regarding all matters relating to crop statistics and marketing in respect of the agricultural produce concerned.
 5. Providing comforts and facilities such as shelters, shade, parking, accommodation and water for the persons, draught cattle, and pack animals coming to the market, and similar other purposes.

Lastly, clauses 18 to 19 of the Bill provide certain penalties for those who contravene the provisions of the Bill, or are found guilty of breach of rules made under this Act.

In Chhotu Ram's view, what "accounts, in some measure, for the poor economic condition of agricultural classes, in their inability to secure a fair price for their produce. The Bill which I have introduced today and now moved to be referred to a select committee is intended to secure a fair price for agricultural classes for their produce."

As usual, certain non-agricultural classes and organizations raised hue and cry and demanded the withdrawal of the legislation. In his characteristically hard hitting speech on the floor of the House Chhotu Ram declared while replying to a question on the Agricultural Produce Marketing Bill: "Sir, Let me put at ease my honourable friends on the opposite benches. I have well nigh finished my speech, and they will soon be able to heave a sigh of relief. The only question that I have yet to deal with is the

one related to their repeated points of order and this need not detain me long. The fact of the matter is that this Bill has given them a very uncomfortable day. But let them recognize that neither noisy conduct in this House, nor the storm of agitation outside will deflect me from my purpose or arrest the progress of this Bill.

“Sir, one sentence more, and I have done, I hope this will also end the uneasiness of my friends of the opposition. One of them went to the length of sounding a note of warning to us, saying, ‘What is it that is weighting upon the minds of the Unionist? They should not exhibit such hot haste. Have they forgotten the fate of Amanullah Khan, who as a result of his haste to reform his country, lost his throne? Let me, Sir, inform my friends that the Amanullah Khan of the Punjab will prove much stronger than the Amanullah Khan of Afghanistan.’”

The Act envisaged the setting up of statutory market committees. The committee was required to be so constituted that two-third representation was to be given to the peasants and one third for the mahajans. Gokal Chand Narang could not restrain himself from using a foul language while opposing the Bill. ‘Through this legislation penny worth peasants would sit along with millionaire mahajans in the committee.’ Chhotu Ram was quick to retort: the peasants deserve no less respect than the Arora majahan. it is the same community about which Narang, during a conference of Haryana Hindus, had said that he was the protector of the Hindu community. The time, Chhotu Ram continued, is not far off when the hardworking peasant would leave the worshippers of money far behind.

The Punjab Weights and Measures Act (1941)

We have explained in an earlier chapter how the dishonest shopkeepers deceived the unwary peasants by using false weights and measures both at the time of giving and of taking agricultural commodities. The Banking Enquiry Committee fully exposed the mahajans by actually undertaking testing their weights and scales used in their transactions.

The Government took in its hands the Bill to prevent all such malpractices. It was now resolved that “the Provincial Government shall provide proper and sufficient means for verifying, adjusting and stamping weights and measures and weighing or measuring instruments in all headquarters, towns and districts and at such other places as the Provincial Government may determine.”

The legislation, it was made clear, was being passed not only in respect of towns, but also in respect of villages. But there were objections to the Bill. How shall it be possible for a man living in remote village to go to a place involving long distances and incur expenditure for getting their weights and measures standardized? To avoid all this inconvenience, it would be well, some members suggested, if the Government took steps, to provide standard weights and measures at the headquarters of all districts, tehsils, sub-tehsils and, if possible, in all the post officers as well.

The Act provided for imprisonment ranging from six months to three years. But a majority of members were dead set against such a provision. It was argued that “prosecution alone is a serious penalty, and there is surely no need for such

a drastic action as imprisonment.” The amendment made in the House by a majority was accepted which stipulated the imposition of a ‘fine which may extend to five hundred rupees or with imprisonment which may extend to three months for failure to pay the fine.’

Amendments to the Punjab Alienation of Lands Act (1900)

The Punjab Alienation of Lands Act was the first ever important step which considerably restricted the unbridled activity of the moneylenders. As we have noted before, one very far reaching impact of this Act was to make a clear distinction between the agriculturist moneylenders and the non-agriculturalist moneylenders. The latter were more troublesome, for they resorted to devices which served to expose the loopholes of the Acts passed. For instance, even after the two Acts — the Relief of Indebtedness and the Restitution of Mortgaged Lands — had been passed, they continued to cling to their profession by claiming themselves agriculturists and took to benami transactions through fraudulent means. It was deemed necessary to make certain amendments to some of the Acts passed, but the Land Alienation Act required more stringent measures to bring them under check. Three such amendments were passed:

1. According to one amendment, no mortgagee or leasee could put the land, which was already in his possession, to a different use from what it was before it was mortgaged, without the consent of the owner in writing. That is to say, agricultural land was to be used

only for purposes of agriculture. In any case, the period of the land under the custody of the moneylender was not to exceed twenty years.

2. According to another amendment certain sales and mortgages of land, found incompatible with the provisions of the Land Alienating Act, were declared invalid or illegal.
3. According to the third amendment, agricultural moneylenders were to be treated as non-agriculturalists which debarred them from acquiring land of their statutory agriculturist debtors.

A General Assessment of the Acts

From what has preceded, it should be evident that Chhotu Ram knew well what he was supposed to do as the leader of the agriculturalists. He knew not only that the peasants were being exploited by the moneylenders but also how they could be saved and put on way to prosperity. The various Acts explained in this chapter speak volumes not only of his single minded devotion to the cause dear to him, but also of his vast knowledge of the subject he was concerned with. The way he formulated the various agricultural Acts and how he defended them in the House from a determined opposition clearly shows the splendid success he attained in his mission. For over two decades he remained in the Council, and it did not matter whether he was a Minister or out of ministry. Nothing could make him budge from the course of action he had chosen for himself while yet an ordinary lawyer. These Acts worked wonders in making the peasantry prosperous and conscious of their dignity and honour in the

society. It seems that whatever he did not, lifetime was sufficient for the peasants to search out their onwards journey.

Even a causal glance at the way the various bills were discussed in the House it appears that not many members were interested in making an indepth study of the drafts of these Bills, nor many were prepared to participate in discussion. But Chhotu Ram had to work hard to ensure passage of his Bills. In early stages he had to encounter much difficulty in convincing others of the urgency behind the Bills. In fact, most members, especially urbanites, were not even familiar with the way the peasants were being exploited, humiliated and even abused. Generally, it was Chhotu Ram who was found on his feet facing volley of questions, and sometimes even personal remarks. His own debt to peasantry is, indeed, so much that none dare repay it. But it looks odd that in his own village Garhi Sampla (Rohtak), there exists nothing to show that a great thinker, a great social reformer, and a great statesman was ever born and lived there for quite some years.

Statesman Par Excellence

Letter to Mahatma Gandhi

Simla East:

15th August, 1944

Revered Mahatma Jee,

1. Kindly excuse me for the addition, which I am making by this communication to the deluge of literature, which must be flowing to you on the subject of Rajaji's Formula.

2. I may say at the very outset that as a true Unionist I am opposed to all communalism and, although a regular and formal Congressman originally, I have always discountenanced the sanctions devised by the Congress to enforce its demands. Now that you are engaged in finding a solution for the communal tangle and the present political deadlock, I may be allowed to convey to you a view which is shared by all the non-Muslims of the Punjab (except a few communalists) and by not inconsiderable proportion of Muslims. It will be hazardous to be dogmatic about even the approximate dimensions of this proportion.

Muslim Attitude

3. It will be futile to deny that the slogan of Pakistan has caught the fancy of an average Muslim and he is unwilling and, in most cases, lacking in an ability to analyse the merits of Pakistan. He cannot or will not perceive the dangers which lurk behind Pakistan even from the Indian Muslim's point of view. The reasons are that, as a result of persistent propaganda carried on, both publicly and privately, he has been schooled into believing that:

- (1) The Hindus are by nature selfish, greedy, unjust and anti-Muslim;
- (2) The Muslims cannot expect a fair deal from the Hindus;
- (3) The Hindus will be all-powerful at the Centre and will also be in an overwhelming majority in all the provinces except N.W.F.P, Sind, Punjab and Bengal, and the result of a federated India will be persecution of Muslims in the Central sphere and emasculation of Provincial Autonomy due to Central interference;
- (4) The only remedy is to insist on partition and establishment of separate sovereign Muslim States in all areas where Muslims are in a majority and to knit these states into a separate federation;
- (5) The separate Muslim federation can later enter into alliances with other Muslim countries and conquer the rest of India;
- (6) It is the duty of all Muslims to rally round one banner and help in the establishment of a state which will be run according to Shariat;

- (7) Islam recognizes no distinction based on caste, race or geographical boundaries;
- (8) The Congress is nothing but a Hindu organization, and the Britishers being displeased with the Congress and the Hindus who are the chief pillars of the Congress, will lend a ready ear to Muslim demands.

With this general picture before his mind's eye an average Muslim is bound to be charmed by the glamour of Pakistan.

Non-Muslim Attitude

4. The Hindus and Sikhs of the Punjab are horror stricken at the prospects of Muslim Raj in the province. They regard India as one and indivisible and look upon a divided India as an arena of constant civil war as an easy prey to any adventurous foreign power. By a wrong presentation of the history of Muslim rule in India and by a generalization based on the incidents of its abnormal periods, Hindus and Sikhs have come to believe that Islamic Raj will only mean a reign of terror, persecution and tyranny for non-Muslims, and will place in danger their religion, culture, liberty, honour, property and laws of inheritance and marriage.

The Rajaji Formula

5. Wholesale exchange of vast populations being sheer madness, large numbers of Muslims will continue to reside in 'Hindu' India and large numbers of non-Muslims will continue to reside in 'Pakistan' India. Thus the Rajaji Formula furnished no solution of the communal problem. Nor does it

hold any promise of a solution of the political deadlock. If anything, it will accentuate the communal problem in the future and complicate further the present tangle. Mr. Jinnah is not going to accept the formula even with minor amendments. He will only use it and its amended form as a fresh starting point for bargaining with the Congress and the Britisher. The formula, even in its present form, is full of dangers. It places communalism on a pedestal from which it will be very difficult to dislodge it. If plebiscite is confined to Muslims, to which, it is feared, you may agree, it will drive the last nail into the coffin of nationalism.

Supposed advantages of the Formula

6. The formula is expected to furnish a solution of the communal tangle and the present political deadlock. As already stated above, it will do neither; it will only create fresh difficulties. It is also supposed that if Mr. Jinnah rejects the formula he will place himself in the wrong in the eyes of the world. Mr. Jinnah does not care for the world. He cares only for the goodwill of the Muslim and the Britisher and this goodwill he will obtain more by rejecting the formula than by accepting it. Further, it is suggested that in the event of an agreement being reached on the formula, Britain will feel constrained to respect it or will stand discredited before the world public opinion. But will not Britain plead that agreement between you and Mr. Jinnah or for that matter, even the agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League does not mean any substantial agreement among all the important elements in the public life of India? This plea can be advanced

all the more easily and plausibly because of the deep and genuine resentment which the formula has caused and any practicable amendment of it will cause among Hindus in general and among non-Muslims of the Punjab and Bengal in particular. Again, scheduled castes and Indian Princes may be counted upon to cast their weight against this agreement.

Objections against the Formula

7. Minor objections apart, the following fundamental objections, resting on primary principles of deep ethical and political significance, can be urged against the formula:

- (1) The formula implies the recognition of Mr. Jinnah's theory that Hindus and Muslims constitute two different nations, and not two sections of one Indian nation.
- (2) The formula implies that religion, which is the private affairs for an individual human being and should concern itself with spiritual matters alone, is the true basis of a State which, (if not always) at least under present conditions, is essentially a secular institution.
- (3) The formula implies that the religious group which is in a majority in a particular territory shall constitute the ruling class and other religious groups, instead of forming equal and integral parts of a common nation, shall only be sub-national groups.
- (4) The offer made by Rajaji and blessed by you treats the Hindus of Bengal and the Hindus and Sikhs of Punjab as mere chattel to be dealt with as you like.

- (5) The provinces which are most intimately affected by the advent of Pakistan are Punjab and Bengal, and yet these provinces were never consulted before the formula was devised or presented to Mr. Jinnah for acceptance or consideration.
- (6) The offer of the Pakistan is a matter of life and death to the Hindus of Bengal and to the Hindu and Sikhs of the Punjab, and yet the offer was made to Mr. Jinnah by men who, however eminent and respected, know precious little about the evil of a communal Raj.
- (7) The formula recognises Mr. Jinnah as the sole representative of the Muslim community and throws to the wolves all those Muslim groups and individuals who, in the midst of a deluge of odium and calumination, have stood by the Congress.
- (8) The formula throws overboard the assurance given to the Sikhs in 1929 that no communal settlement will be arrived at without consulting them.

Evil consequences of the offer

- 8. The offer will produce evil consequences of a very far-reaching character. Some of them are enumerated below:
 - (a) It was made at a time when the prestige and influence of Mr. Jinnah had received a rude shock first in the Punjab and then in Kashmir. It has buttressed the position of Mr. Jinnah and has prevented the opposition against him from gathering the momentum which it would have done otherwise and has further affected the pace at which this momentum would have been gathered.

- (b) It has, at least partially, helped to keep up or restore the morale of Muslim leaguers.
- (c) It will discourage, if not altogether demoralise, the Muslim allies of the Congress.
- (d) It will weaken the faith of Sikhs and other minorities in the word of Congress.
- (e) It will encourage Mr. Jinnah to obtain an increasingly high bid alternatively from the Congress and British.

True remedy

9. It is difficult to escape from the conclusion that a wrong remedy has been adopted by Rajaji and yourself. The formula bears the impress of despair on the one hand and deep-seated prejudice. I will not call it ill-will against the Britisher on the other. In your impatience to get rid of British domination - a very laudable objective in itself - both you and Rajaji have betrayed yourselves into a course which, contrary to your wishes and expectations, will initially and temporarily help to strengthen the grip of British domination and ultimately produce political conditions calculated to eliminate British domination and fasten instead an iron grip of an intolerant and intolerable theocracy, dominated and directed mainly by alien elements. Will it be disrespectful to remind you that, according to your own teachings, yielding to despair or defeatism or prejudice bordering upon ill-will is inconsistent with the creed of satyagraha?

10. The true remedy is to put up, temporarily, with the lesser of the two evils and use the interval to strengthen and

consolidate the forces of nationalism and patriotism on such a scale and to such a pitch that they will enable the country to rid itself of the lesser evils also. The concrete steps which can be suggested for attaining this purpose are as follows:-

- (1) The Congress should resume office in the provinces with a resolute will to help in winning the war and ridding India and the world of the menace of German and Japanese militarism.
- (2) The Congress should strive to obtain for elected representatives of the people as much power at the Centre as British wisdom and goodwill can be persuaded to part with. This should be done with the co-operation of Mr. Jinnah if possible, and without it if necessary. Both the Government and Mr. Jinnah should be told clearly that the Congress is prepared to co-operate at the Centre with the help of other Muslims, if Mr. Jinnah proves unduly intransigent, and in the provinces even if the Centre is only inadequately improved or is left as it is. This looks like surrender, but it is much better than a surrender on the principle of the indivisibility of the country or the integrity of Indian nationhood. In any case, such an attitude is more likely to induce a reasonable response on the part of Mr. Jinnah than a policy of weak surrender, and will produce a much more favourable impression in Great Britain and on the world opinion.
- (3) The policy of appeasement should be given up once and for all. An ounce of Churchill will do the

Congress immeasurably greater good than tons of Chamberlain.

- (4) The communal problem is at bottom an economic problem, and if an economic programme visibly favourable to backward and exploited classes is adopted in all provinces and also at the Centre the fire of communalism will begin to lose its fury and get ultimately extinguished from the sheer lack of the fuel on which it feeds.
- (5) The formation of political parties and the organization of the country's population on the basis of common economic interests should be actively encouraged and promoted.
- (6) Religion should be banished from politics. Of course, this does not mean that politics should be divorced from universally accepted moral and ethical principles. What is meant is that the stranglehold of denominational religion on Indian politics should be removed. The general public be persuaded to drop separate electorates and, as a first step, joint electorates with reservation of seats may be advocated as a substitute for the present system.

A Warning against Certain Fallacies

11. There are certain fallacies against which a warning is called for. These fallacies are set forth below:

- (a) Temperamentally, Mr. Jinnah is a demolisher, not a builder; he is a destroyer, not a constructor;

he is a separationist, not a unionist. There is no common ground between him and you. It is wrong to suppose that you can appease him except at a price which no Indian should agree to pay.

- (b) Even though Mr. Jinnah seems to be very strong at the present moment, it is a mistake to believe that he has much intrinsic strength. His strength is derived from (i) the countenance which he has received in the past from the Britisher. (ii) the ill-conceived importance which the Congress has always attached to him and the interminable concessions which a policy of appeasement has accorded, (iii) the wrong approach which the Hindu community in general has exhibited in the matter of its opposition to Pakistan, and (iv) the popularity of the slogan of an undefined Pakistan.
- (c) It is wrong to suppose that the Britisher will continue to attach the same value to Mr. Jinnah as he did in the past. As a result of a change in your view or of a greater clarification of your true attitude and of a change in the war situation his 'nuisance value' has diminished to a very large extent. Of positive value he never had much.
- (d) It is a greater error if you fancy that you can obtain Mr. Jinnah's co-operation in fighting against British domination by offering him any concession. The Britisher can always outbid you there.

- (e) Indian independence can be won only as a result of India's own intrinsic strength and British good-will. Do not think that the world opinion or the opinion of the Allied Nations can be an effective factor. The Allied cannot go to war with Great Britain in the interest of Indian freedom and mere good offices or polite language of intercession will not induce Mr. Churchill to preside at a conference for liquidating the British Empire. In the matter of our hope and desire to enlist the sympathy of Allied Nations let us not be unduly optimistic. China, America and Russia are undoubtedly sympathetic to our aspirations. But China will not, now and for some time to come, be in a position to pull in international affairs, the weight it is entitled to. Russia has a great interest in the spread of its ideology than in the freedom of India, and we cannot judge whether Russia considers a free or subject India as a more congenial soil for the propagation of communism. Ordinary human sympathy apart, America has a deeper and more abiding interest in its trade than in India's freedom. A free India will present better opportunities to America for competing on equal terms with Britain in the field of trade than a subject India. That will sustain America's interest in India's freedom whether you are or are not able to place Great Britain in the wrong over the present issue. On the other hand, if Great Britain assures America of a fair deal in the matter of her trade rights in India or success in frightening America by suggesting that a free India

may adopt a very stiff policy of protection against all foreign countries, America's interest in India's freedom may diminish *pro tanto*. In any case, while the goodwill or intercession of Allied Nations is not a thing to be desisted as a help, nothing can be a substitute for our own intrinsic strength or British good-will. Rajaji's formula, if accepted by Mr. Jinnah will spell disaster to India's intrinsic strength and, if rejected, will bring gratuitous humiliation and discredit to the Congress. It will also affect adversely the goodwill of the British authorities and British public for this reason, if for no other, that it concedes clearly what they have always been so obviously reluctant to concede.

- (f) Mr. Jinnah has always been an obstacle in the way of India's freedom. It will be wrong to imagine that as a result of Rajaji's offer he will cease to be an obstructionist. Only he will extract some more concessions from you in connection with that offer and with those concessions in his pocket he will see the Viceroy and ask for a still higher price for playing his role of an obstructionist.
- (g) Mr. Jinnah's present conciliatory mood should not be misunderstood or misinterpreted. It does not indicate any permanent change in his political outlook. It is a mere passing reaction to his unexpected experience in the purpose of stemming the tide of rising anger among the thinking section of the Muslim community against his dictatorial methods and overbearing manner.

- (h) Whatever the clamour among urban Muslims and their pressing for a partition of India, the Muslim and non-Muslim martial classes of Punjab and their one million sons fighting at the front will be deeply incensed when they realize the consequences of partition to their pensions and their future prospects of employment in the Indian army. Both Indian public men and the British authorities require to be warned against any facile assumption that these elements of the Punjab population will take things lying down if the Congress and the Muslim League come to a settlement without consulting the wishes of these elements and the British authorities accept the settlement without reference to them.

How to Treat Mr. Jinnah

9. While Mr. Jinnah should be treated with all the courtesy and respect which is due to his position, he should not be encouraged in his attitude of intransigence by undue deference to his demands or wishes. The following course of action is suggested for serious consideration:

- (1) The formula should be placed for consideration before a meeting of the Working Committee and no prior promise of advocating its acceptance should be given.
- (2) The Punjab and Bengal should be heard on behalf of Hindus and Sikhs before the Working Committee comes to a decision.
- (3) Mr. Jinnah should be asked-
 - (a) to define precisely the limits of the Pakistan portion of Punjab and Bengal;

- (b) to disclose in general terms the system of Government which will be adopted in Pakistan;
 - (c) to give a rough and general outline of the laws relating to inheritance or succession, land tenure, alienation of property, composition of courts and civil and criminal jurisprudence, which will govern the rights of the people;
 - (d) to state roughly the economic system which will be adopted in Pakistan, that is, will this system be based on capitalism or socialism or communism?
 - (e) To state the share which will be allotted to Hindus, Sikhs and other minorities in the units of Pakistan.
- (4) Mr. Jinnah should be told in unambiguous terms; that in the non-Pakistani India recruitment to services is likely to be by competition without any reservation of seats for Muslims and election to Legislatures and local bodies by joint electorates without any reservation of seats for Muslims.
- (5) It should also be made clear that-
- (a) Pakistan will receive no subsidy from the non-Pakistani India to help its deficit units of Sind, Baluchistan and N.W.F.P;
 - (b) Inhabitants of Pakistan will not be enlisted in the army of the non-Muslim federation;
 - (c) Pakistan will have to make its own arrangements for the payment of pensions earned by its inhabitants of their service in the present Indian Army.

A knowledge of all these things is essential so that the people may know when they go to plebiscite, what they are voting for and what will be the implications of separation. A clear perception of the consequences of Pakistan will result in an immense diminution of support to the chimera of Pakistan and of Mr. Jinnah's popularity among Muslims.

I hope you will be able to give serious thought to the subject-matter of this communication.

Yours sincerely

Chhotu Ram

The Philosophy of Life

Since times immemorial great men have been born in all countries and in all ages with a view to doing some good to the humanity at large, in one way or another (loksangraha).¹ Though much like us outwardly, they are clearly distinguishable from others inwardly, insofar as they will necessarily act from sheer love of goodness, without hope of recompense.² They are those who in order to emancipate sentient beings from misery, are inspired with great spiritual energy and mingle themselves in the filth of birth and death. Though thus they make themselves subject to the laws of birth and death, their hearts are free from sins and attachments. They are like unto those immaculate, undefiled lotus flowers which grow out of mire, yet are not contaminated by it.³

Influence of the Gita

Throughout the whole of his life Chhotu Ram exhibited the influence the Gita had profoundly exerted on him even while he was a student at school. Once he explained the steady growth of his moral development in these words.

¹ BG., iii. 20; xii. 4.

² ii., 47

³ T.D. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, pp. 193-4

“In my dogged persistence on the path of what I have considered to be my duty, I had been chiefly sustained by the divine philosophy expounded on the famous battlefield of Kurukshetra more than five thousand years ago. Lord Krishna says, “Thou shalt not depart from the path of duty by any hope of reward or fear of penalty; thy only concern is with action, not with the fruit thereof. In the performance of thy duty thou shalt be indifferent to comfort and discomfort, to gains and losses, and to victory and defeat”⁴

Chhotu Ram continued: “I have a deep conviction in the teachings of Lord Krishna. This conviction reflects the inner soul of my politics and constitutes the real philosophy of my life. I have chosen the path of serving the weak and raising the fallen, according to my own lights, and I have chosen the agricultural classes as the symbol of weakness and as the standard-bearers of the army of rescue and relief against the forces of social tyranny and economic exploitation.”

Thus the *Gita* became the passion of Chhotu Ram’s soul and he drew all inspiration and hope from acting according to its fundamental spiritual law, dharma. All action is binding on me as my duty if, and only if, it pertains to the station which I occupy in my life. Arjuna, for instance, had a certain station in life and certain duties relative to it. But he was not prepared to impose the law of his spiritual self (dharma) on his will, so much so that he was prepared to be killed at the battlefield even by his adversaries. Here the *Gita* makes a clear distinction between ‘dharma’ and ‘para-dharma’. It is in an hour of crisis that the higher self struggles to maintain its natural integrity and reminds us:

⁴ Extract from Silver Jubilee Speech, 1st March 1942.

“Better is one’s own dharma, though imperfectly carried out, than para-dharma, carried out perfectly. Better is death in one’s own dharma, for to follow para-dharma is fraught with danger.”⁵

The distinction the Gita makes between dharma and adharma is, indeed, crucial to an understanding of Chhotu Ram’s point of view. An action is binding on me if, and only if, it has to be performed because I have occupied a certain place in my society. But if, on the contrary, I refuse to acknowledge my responsibility for the duty which relates to the station I occupy in the society, I am not at all a moral man. In the present context we shall refer to two instances to explain how Chhotu Ram sought to find out a way consistent with his conviction.

Laws are Supreme

Kallu Singh, a childhood friend of Chhotu Ram, had a plan to import five thousand bags of rice from the neighbouring Sind province, presumably to make easy money by selling them in the blackmarket. With this end in view, Kallu Singh approached Chhotu Ram and requested him to issue a permit for import of five thousand bags of rice from Sind. Chhotu Ram’s reply was: “No, will such a permit not rob the regular dealers of what is their due? And, do you think that just because I am a friend of yours and belong to the same village I should sacrifice their interests? Sorry, I cannot be a party to such a deal.”

⁵ BG., iii, 35.

Not convinced by Chhotu Ram, Kallu Singh pursued his plan vigorously. It so happened that, while waiting for a train bound for Karachi, he was accosted by a military-man, and soon both became friends because the two happened to be Haryanvis. Kallu Singh enjoyed his friend's hospitality and travelled in his compartment without a ticket. Luck still favoured him. Mr. Young, an English police officer, was posted in Sind and Kallu Singh developed friendship with him by telling how he was a close friend of Chhotu Ram. Kallu prevailed upon the English officer to give him an introduction letter in the name of the Sind Premier. The way was now smooth for Kallu, and he returned to Lahore to tell Chhotu Ram how he had got what was not given to him. Chhotu Ram was shocked at his devilish act, and immediately got in touch with the Sind Premier to request him to cancel the permit. Chhotu Ram asked Kallu Singh to return home with rupees six hundred which he gave from his own pocket as the expenses incurred by his friend, Kallu.

Another friend of Chhotu Ram, Kanhaiya Lal, had made handsome donation of fifteen hundred rupees to the *Jat Gazette*. Kanhiya Lal was by profession a moneylender, but he had suffered heavily in the wake of many legislations passed to contain illegal activities of moneylenders. To make good his financial losses, he took Ghasi Ram, a well known figure of Delhi, along with him and both met Chhotu Ram who was attending a conference in Simla. A request was made by Ghasi Ram to bail Kanhiya Lal out of his present predicament, by issuing him a permit for khandsari. Chhotu Ram regretted his inability on the ground that the prevalent rules did not favour any such request.

Does all this not look paradoxical that a politician should talk of being guided by conscience in the discharging of his duties? Yes, it does, especially in the context of present day brand of politics. But Chhotu Ram did not mind displeasing even his close friends to uphold the dictates of his 'true self.' A highly evolved soul, he was always guided by principles of morals rather than political expediency.

Ram Sarup, at one time MLA of Khidwali village in Rohtak District, had worked as Chhotu Ram's chief election agent. Once while Ram Sarup was at Lahore, he accompanied Chhotu Ram to his office. Close to Chhotu Ram's bungalow was Abdul Haq's residence. Chhotu Ram took him also with him and all the three began to discuss party affairs. After a shortwhile Ram Sarup stood up to take leave of Chhotu Ram and Abdul Haq, but before going out of the room he said to Chhotu Ram: "Chaudhary Sahib, the work which I have already discussed with you must be done today without any further delay." Chhotu Ram was quick to tell him that what he had been talking about was something against all laws and principles, and that he was not going to do anything. Ram Sarup was more emphatic and told Chhotu Ram that, if this was not done, soon the entire Jat community would be angry with him and would not support him in future elections. Chhotu Ram shot back in anger: "Ram Sarup, get out of my room and don't enter my house again. Go and work against me and get me dismissed, but I will not do anything against the rules of justice, whether it be a matter concerning any individual or the Jat community."⁶

⁶ CRC., p. 163

It is common knowledge that Chhotu Ram offered scholarships to deserving students, regardless of considerations of caste and religion. The Shakti Bhawan was a place for every visitor to the Punjab capital, Lahore, which to all intents and purposes, served as the Haryana Bhawan. Many of those who were recipients of scholarships rose to high positions in life. Some of the beneficiaries are still alive. A few years back Swami Omanand, along with others, was invited to dinner by a retired Government servant, Maktul Singh, a Harijan by caste, at his Chandigarh residence. Maktul Singh's room was adored by a photograph of Chhotu Ram on the wall, and this surprised Swamiji, who asked how he knew Chhotu Ram. Maktul narrated the entire sequence of events in a highly emotional way. "After having suffered humiliation at the hands of some students and teachers in my village school, a good Samaritan, named Ram Kishan, got me admitted to the Jat High School at Rohtak. Here I found the atmosphere very congenial and I began to work hard and soon got in the good books of the teachers, even though they knew I was a Chamaar by caste. One day Chhotu Ram came to the School to preside over the Annual Day Celebrations. I was a student of seventh class at that time and one of my teachers helped me prepare a speech in English for the occasion. Chhotu Ram heard every word of my speech with rapt attention. To a teacher standing near him, he said that I should be brought to him after the function was over. Accordingly, when Chaudhary Sahib was about to get into his car, the concerned teacher took me to him. He cast a close glance at me, lifted me into his arms and said to me; "You are my son and I will see what little I can do for you." He got me brought to his Lahore residence and paid for all my school fees. I was given all help

and facilities and after my graduation I was appointed to a good post. Not my own poor parents could do all this, but he did it all and I was sometimes thinking that what I have got is not what any boy of my caste would ever get.”

For Chhotu Ram nothing counted anything like caste or creed. He helped those who belonged to zamindar families. One young boy of an Ahir family, Rao Ram Narayan, who later rose to be a Minister in the Bhajan Lal ministry, was Chhotu Ram's favourite. He records his impressions about Chhotu Ram thus: “Chhotu Ram visited Ambala when I was under going training there (as Tehsildar). All officers gathered to receive him at the circuit house. On seeing me he affectionately enquired about my health, service conditions and welfare. All those who were present were astonished to see Chhotu Ram's affection and solicitation for his ‘men’. He advised me to serve the people honestly and please officers by hard work, dedication, and truthfulness.”⁷ We have already referred to the extraordinarily ethical decision taken by Chhotu Ram to return, with a deep sense of gratitude, 518 bighas of land (approximately 100 acres) to its rightful owners, Rajmal son of Ram Singh of Bohar village, and Harke Ram son of Udmi Ram of Singhpura Village, (both of Rohtak District). This was the land which they had gifted to their Leader in 1937 to enable him to contest the Assembly election from the statutory land-owners' constituency. Rumours had been circulated that Chhotu Ram had to do so to avoid his political opponent, Shri Ram Sharma's criticism or from fear of split of votes.

⁷ CRC., p. 116

Practical Realism

Chhotu Ram wrote to a political opponent soon after having delivered a hard-hitting speech in the Assembly in 1936: "I am neither thick-skinned nor thin-shinned. I am a normal man with a normal man's feelings. I don't believe in Christ's teaching that you should turn your right cheek also, if you are smitten on the left. I believe in the teaching of Moses: an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. If you hurl a stone at me, I will hurl a heavier stone at you. Please don't squeal when you are hit. I promise you I won't." The statement is characteristic of a man who always was true to his convictions. We cite here an interesting episode narrated by Abdul Haque. "Chaudhari Sahib came to address a meeting at the Law College Hall, Lahore. The students of the DAV College, who were opposed to Chaudhari Sahib, came in large numbers. Chaudhari Sahib stood up and said, "Mere azizo" (My children). At this the DAV College students started shouting. When there was a slight pause, Chaudhari Sahib said, "Naukili topiwalo, Chhotu Ram jab gharse koi kam karne aata hai tau bagair kiye nahin jaata; aaj Chhotu Ram iss hawl mein taqrir karne aya hai aur taqrir kar ke jayega (You, wearing sharp-edged caps, Chhotu Ram does not return home without accomplishing the work for which he had set out from home. Today Chhotu Ram has come to make a speech in this hall and he will go back only after making the speech). At this the boys resorted to a still greater noise and they also hurled small rolls of paper and stones rolled in paper on the dais. The Deputy Commissioner and I, who were sitting at the dais, requested Chaudhari Sahib to sit down but he declined. When he realized that the boys did not mend their ways, he said: "Nahin hai koi Jat larka Pakar Lo in haramzadon ko" (Are

there no Jat boys? Catch these bastards). At this about half a dozen Jat boys stood up and they taught a lesson to the DAVies, who started jumping out of door and window. Then Chaudhari Sahib said, “Naukili topi walo ab kyon jaate ho: mein tumhari dhotiyan yahin dhulwaoon ga” (You, weaning sharp-edged caps, where do you run now? I shall get your dhotis washed here). Quiet was restored and Chaudhari Sahib delivered his speech.”⁸

Abdul Hage continued: “I enquired from Lala Des Raj, who was Chaudhary Sahib’s Personal Assistant and a Khatri by caste, as to how did he pull on with Chaudhari Sahib. He stated in reply that he was always on the lookout to find something against the Minister so as to trump it up and create some trouble for him..... He added that sometimes when on tour, he would go from Ambala to his native place, Rohtak, and then return to Ambala after a day or two but did not charge TA or DA for that period, and that he had on some occasions prepared bills for the Minister including TA and DA for such periods but the Minister had always scored it out. When told that he had done some official work at Rohtak his reply always was that he had attended to some private work as well.”⁹

Sir Zafarullah Khan, a judge of the Federal Court of India, once said that he “had never come across anyone in his varied life, nationally and inter-nationally, with so much integrity as Sir Chhotu Ram. Integrity in every sense, so great that he had to try and think of another word to describe his honesty of purpose and action.”

The British bureaucracy was ever on the lookout for a

⁸ CRC., pp. 163-64.

⁹ Ibid., p. 164.

suitable occasion to detach Chhotu Ram from the Unionist Party which had gradually gained considerable following in Punjab. Now, they thought of a different plan. The search was on for some one who could be a member of the Tribunal proposed to be set up to try those alleged to be involved in the Lahore conspiracy case. Chhotu Ram was offered a huge amount of money by way of remuneration and later a high position in the Federal Court of India. Chhotu Ram rejected the offer outright, Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukhdev were to be tried for sedition. He said in reply: "The charges against the conspirators are serious enough, but they had been misled by inexperience. Besides, their acts, howsoever condemnable, were committed under the highest patriotic sentiment and he could not agree to their being tried as criminals." Chhotu Ram was ever vocal in telling both his friends and foes alike that "political subjugation and foreign domination were as irksome to me as they were to any patriotic Indian, and as they should be to any normal human being." He spoke in a similar vein elsewhere: "All Indians — Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Parsees — should unite in the cause of the country. There is hardly an Indian who does not wish that India should be free from the yoke of foreigners. In a country like India, which abounds in different religions and numerous communities, it is essential that they should all unite in their fight for political rights. Unless there is Hindus-Muslim unity, the third party would continue to rule over India. It is the duty of Hindu-Muslim leaders to make a sincere attempt to achieve communal unity."¹¹

¹⁰ CRC., p. 155.

¹¹ SCR., p. 115

“Khudi” was the aim

Iqbal’s profound philosophic wisdom found its expression in the following lines:

*Khudi ko kar buland intna ke har taqdir se pehle
Khuda bande se khud poochhe bata teri raza kya hai.*

Chhotu Ram was much impressed by the way these lines expressed a characteristically spiritual relationship of equality between man and God. Khudi and Khuda are both bound by a common spiritual element, called indifferently ‘atman’, ‘purusha’, ‘chetana’ etc., in Hindu texts and treatises. However there is much spiritual gap between the two. The human self has its own limitations. As the Mahabharata states: ‘I know what is dharma but have no inclination to follow it: I know what is adharma but I have no inclination to desist from it.’ St. Paul had the germ of the matter in him when he said: ‘The good that I would, I don’t, the evil that I would not, that I do.’

The question that naturally arises is: How to bridge the gulf between the human will and the Divine Will? The *Gita* from which Chhotu Ram drew inspiration, speaks of the path of disinterested performance of action in accordance with the station one occupies in one’s social group. This is karmayoga. The ultimate result of the practice of karma-yoga is the emergence of ‘equanimity of outlook’ (sammattvam yoga uchyate). Chhotu Ram reached such a yogic stage and undertook all action as the means to fulfilling the will and command of God (Ishvartha). He was a karma-yogi in the sense of following ‘the path of serving the weak and raising

the fallen'. His will had become firmly established in his 'khudi', and that is why no impulse or passion could overpower him in his judgment. He had a mission in life which he was able to complete to a very great extent. Nothing could tempt, nothing could deflect him from the path of duty. Little wonder then that he has been described as a statesman or rajrishi.

The Last Days

The picture which we want to paint here from the material presented in the book seems to suggest that Chhotu Ram was a man of action. As the son of a poor zamindar, he had to travel long distances on foot to receive his education and through sheer hard work he attained spectacular success in each class. Even in an elite Christian school he excelled even those students who belonged to affluent families. He had to confront serious difficulties at each step, 'especially in money matters, but never confessed defeat. Right from his early days he displayed signs of keen observation of both events and persons. Whether it was education, profession or politics, it was a deep sense of commitment to his cause that motivated all his activity. As a lawyer he set examples before his colleagues and presented to his clients as a role model; and as a politician he had his own principles from which he never deviated, even if he had to displease or annoy dearest of his friends. That was why he was always respected in the political circles, even outside his province.

Whenever he spoke from the Unionist platforms, he created around him a big gathering who came to hear him not as a politician but as a man with honest convictions, clear ideas and a philosophic vision. If he spoke as a Unionist he would talk about all that was there in the realm of truth or

reality. He was not a politician in the contemporary sense of the term. He quoted facts and figures which were always on his finger tips and spoke in intelligible terms to his peasant-fraternity. And when his audience dispersed, it was the general impression that every person was returning home after taking something tangible with him. The didactic style of his public speeches kept many spell bound, for hours sometimes.

Time was fleeting while there were too many irons in the fire. The mounting pressure of Jinnah's communal threats was weighing heavily on Chhotu Ram's mind; there were invitations for him to visit the various districts to organise the Zamindar League, with offices to be established in each tehsil (sub-division) and also propagate the various Golden Acts and the immense advantages to follow from them to the peasants. The Punjab Restitution of Mortgaged Lands Act had created ripples in the zamindar circles of the Province, and people were eager to hear Chhotu Ram in this context.

Accordingly, Chhotu Ram began to chalk out programmes for addressing meetings in different towns and villages. Surprisingly enough, in the entire Unionist Party he was perhaps the solitary figure who was well versed in problems or issues concerning the peasants. With each passing day tremendous pressure was mounting on him, but he alone could not do justice to the volume of the work he was supposed to do. The result was that the increasing pressure began to tell upon his health. He often missed his lunch and had his dinner at late hours in the night. But rest, only rarely, and that too not for hours but only for minutes. Whether in his residence or in his office, he had to face hundreds of visitors and listen to them patiently and do, if possible, something for their satisfaction. "And despite hectic activity, he found time to

attend the voluminous correspondence from the small and the big — for instance, from illiterate peasant's sons who sent scores of letters addressed to just *Chhotu Lahore* or like the one who wrote on behalf of his father, inscribed the address as *Chhotu Vizier Qayamat* (instead of *Tariqiat*)¹ which he had forgotten. He replied to each and every letter — signed and unsigned — wrote articles for the press and the rebuttal statements against all sorts of attacks by the communalists among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs against the Unionist party.”² But for all this he carried on his routine work.

But for how long? In early November 1944 he had gone to Jhang to address a public meeting and, on the insistence of the audience, continued speaking for three hours, unmindful of the fact that he was running temperature. The result was that soon after finishing his speech he fainted and sought to maintain the balance of his body by leaning on his walking stick. He was rushed to Lahore and by the time he reached his residence the temperature had shot up further. He complained of pain in his chest, and the diagnosis was crystal clear. He had suffered a heart attack, and was soon put under the treatment of his family physician, Dr. Nand Lal Deshwal and soon he started showing signs of recovery. But the nature of ailment made everyone anxious. The news of his ailment was flashed across by the press, complicating the matter further. There were callers at his residence, and it was another problem to receive their good wishes and prayers for his early recuperation. To add to the anxiety about his health, he had

¹ Qayamat in Urdu means deluge, destruction of the world. The correct word to have been used was *Taraqiat* which means ‘development’ which was Chhotu Ram’s portfolio

² SCR., p. 148

malarial fever accompanied by dysentery. Consequently, he became weaker so much that it was difficult to walk even a few steps. One thing that continued to flash across his mind was the Bhakra Dam which awaited his approval as the project was to be started immediately. While yet on bed, he ordered prompt payment of six crores of rupees to the Sind Government which the Punjab Government was supposed to pay as per the agreement. Chhotu Ram gave final touches to the agreement with the Maharaja of Bilaspur State in whose territory the reservoir of the Dam was to be raised. His mind now became peaceful, and with some rest and medication he appeared to have gained normalcy. However, anxiety returned when on November 24 a mild attack was noted by Dr. Nand Lal. Good enough, the crisis blew over, albeit for a short time.

Friends and relatives heaved a sigh of relief, and the fact that everything was getting normal was monitored both through the press and the local radio. A special session of Assembly was called to discuss the situation arising out of some Unionists' crossing the floor and seeking to form a Muslim League ministry by toppling the Unionist Government. He wanted to save the Khizar Government from being hijacked in his absence, and was, therefore, keen to attend the session. But he was compelled to stay indoors. Nevertheless, even in his bed he maintained his minute-to-minute contact with the developments in the House. The Muslim League members were badly defeated, and Chhotu Ram was again in his normal self to keep up with the times.

Convinced of his steady and satisfactory recovery, he expressed the wish to be left alone in his room, not even the doctors were to be present there. When every body had left the room, he stood up to see if his body could maintain its

balance properly. He got up from his bed, and, as bad luck would have it, he fell down on the floor, unconscious. Soon Dr. Nand Lal forced his entry into the room and found Chhotu Ram sweating profusely. He was given medical aid, the best possible that could be given, and once again there were moments of relief. He was peaceful throughout the night, and appeared to be near-normal in the morning. He took tea and read the newspapers as usual. It was on 9th morning when he hoped to meet people and acknowledge their good wishes for speedy recovery. But soon all was lost. Chhotu Ram had a massive heart attack around 10 in the morning. Premier Khizar Hayat was called and soon he was at his bed side. After sometime Chhotu Ram returned to a tranquil state, as generally happens at the time of death, and said in a dim voice: "mein chala, Ram bhala kare" (I am going, God bless all). Thereupon he closed his eyes and soop was in a state of 'samadhi'. All around in Lahore, in the Punjab and throughout the entire North India the tragic news had cast a spell of gloom.

The mortal frame of the body was wrapped in the Unionist flag, and the Shakti Bhawan, which once was the place for people to come to Chhotu Ram for one thing or another, wore the look of a big tragedy. The last journey for the mortal body was for Prem Niwas, also known as Neeli Kothi, in Rohtak. The body was kept here for people to come and pay their respects to the departed soul. There were pathetic scenes when the body was received from a truck by his family members and relatives. Thousands of his admirers, mostly the tribe of peasants, thronged the place of cremation, the Jat High School ground at Rohtak. They were sobbing-inconsolably. The last scene, which made many people hysteric, was described by a correspondent of the *Tribune* in

these words: “Mourners from the adjoining districts and rural areas poured in by all means of transport to have the last look of their benefactor.” Peasants were tight-lipped, having no words in their mouths but only tears in their eyes. On the 13th day (tehraveen) people gathered in Garhi--Sampla to pay their respects. Bhajaniks like Nar Singh and Pyare Lal were there to sing in praise of the departed leader. Pyare Lal gave his song that brought out tears from almost all eyes.

*Lawaris kunbe ka khiwaiya ib kaun uthega,
Dehat mein ib Chhotu Ram kaun kahawega.*

(Chhotu Ram’s death had rendered us all orphans. Who will be known as Chhotu Ram in the rural areas now?)

Needless to say, Mrs. Gyano Devi, wife of the late leader, received thousands of telegrams from far and wide, containing condolence messages, among whom were politicians who praised his services to the cause of the peasants and their appreciation for the bold stand the late leader took against Jinnah.

The Lahore print media that had been unduly critical of Chhotu Ram all through his political career and saw nothing but his ‘incompetence’, came out with obituary references, with a changed mood as demanded by the sad occasion. We reproduce some of the references here. *The Hindustan Times*: “The death is most untimely in that he was a tower of strength to the Unionist coalition against the onslaught of the Muslim League.”

The Tribune: “Against the repeated fierce onslaughts of rabid communalism, Sir Chhotu Ram stood like the rock of Gibraltar. He was a fighter to the very marrow of his bones.”

The Civil and Military Gazette: The paper was all praise for Chhotu Ram's "pioneer measures in modern economic history of India.". It added: "similarly the Legislative Assembly since 1937 bristles with enactments the purpose of which Sir Chhotu Ram held dearest to his heart. His unremitting championship of Unionism against the manifestations of communalism was never more convincingly demonstrated than during the stress of the Unionist-League controversy, and history will reveal how great a part he played in forcing Mr. Jinnah's strategic retreat from the Punjab last summer. In the rough and tumble of the Assembly sessions he stood head and shoulders above his colleagues on the ministerial benches."

The Milap: "It would not be incorrect to say that Sir Chhotu Ram was the crew of the Punjab boat. The storms came, the boat dashed against hostile winds, it passed through rivers of flood but the boatman held the anchor so firmly in his hand that it astonished all spectators."

The Pratap: "The passing away of Sir Chhotu Ram is a most lamentable event. In him the Punjab has lost a most hardworking and powerful politician. He has left a void which will never be filled. He has gone when the province needed him most."

"Lives of great men, all remind us,
We can make our lives sublime.
And departing, leave behind us,
Footprints on the sand of time."

The Place in History

By 1940 Chhotu Ram was in a position to proudly claim that he had successfully exhausted the whole of his agenda on agrarian reforms. However, such a claim was not without *raison d'être*. What remained thereafter for him to do was, firstly, to ensure their speedy implementation; and, secondly, to make a clear assessment to their impact on the Punjab peasantry. Though initially dedicated to the promotion of his community's interests, in his political life later he transcended this limitation and devoted himself to the interests of peasantry as part of a larger national cause. Possessed of a liberal outlook and an altruistic attitude, he could not possibly leave behind a substantial segment of rural population in the country's onward march towards peace, progress and prosperity. Like many nationalists, he believed that Hindu-Muslim unity was the key to Indian freedom. The Unionist Party, he said, provided the best living reality of such a unity on the Punjab soil. He had demonstrated both to his friends and foes that the Party had achieved results which no other parties had done even after decades of their existence. Chhotu Ram gave unmistakable indications of possessing human qualities in abundant measures, such as a thoroughly secular mentality, a transparent attitude towards his subordinates etc. These qualities, he believed, readily enabled him to establish

between himself and his people that abiding relationship which made him 'Rahbar-i-Azam' a friend of the afflicted (deen-bandhu), a demigod (Chhotu Ram), a living hero, a living legend, a living idol of the peasantry. It was hardly anything short of a miracle that he should have carried forward his crusade against exploitation of peasantry to its logical culmination, all by himself. Even an organization like the Congress vehemently opposed those very Bills that were in to demand repeal of the agrarian enactments, termed "black bills". The Congress High Command felt considerably upset when it learnt of its members in the Assembly opposite these Bills. The compliance of the High Command's instructions was just for show; often the Congressmen lent their tacit support to other party workers in and outside the House. But never did Chhotu Ram's qualities of character allow such elements to have their way.

Character, the Main Quality of Man

Chhotu Ram never claimed to be possessed of superhuman qualities, though he possessed them in abundance. He was a born leader of men, an honest politician, a statesman, and above all, a patriot. It was he—and he alone—who told Jinnah that there was no room for communalism either in the Unionist Party or in the country. No there was no room for communalism either in the Unionist Party or in the country. No one else had the courage to tell Jinnah that India is one, Indians are one, and that no one can dismember India in any way. Fazl-i-Hussain, Sikandar Hayat and Khizar Hayat seemed to be at one time running with the hare and at another hunting with the hound.

None had the courage of conviction: none to tell Jinnah in emphatic and unequivocal terms that he had better convince

himself that the Unionist ministry would at no cost be merged into any thing like the Muslim League ministry. It was Chhotu Ram's 'blunt style' that made Jinnah realize the ground situation who left the Punjab capital, disappointed and disillusioned. Rajaji's Formula had enough of indication as to which way the wind was going to blow in the Congress camp. Chhotu Ram's far and frank views went unheeded many a time because he was just a minister obsessed with peasants' concern, and nothing more. Some believed him to be an eccentric reformer and even a wily politician. Others, who were economically well off, took his outbursts against official apathy and redtapism with cold disfavour. He was determined to change the old order wherever he found it not properly responding to the needs of times, but there were not many who expressed their concern or anxiety over such issues. He believed that the only sign of the greatness of a group, society or country was the strength of its character, its ideals and ideologies. The letter Chhotu Ram wrote to the Jat officers of Punjab clearly reveals how evolved his soul was. To quote a few lines from this letter: "I wish to remind you that we are the sons of those people who lived on roots and jowar chapattis with onions and curd, and were healthier than many of us. I do not consider recreation as bad, but I do not like the type of recreation which is responsible for the degradation of character. And addiction to alcohol is such a bad thing that it has been responsible in the past for the fall of several empires and kingdoms. No religion favours drinking. Nor does any scripture approve it. The common people deprecate it. Experienced people have warned against it. With a laxity of character, one goes down the slope, for once one is caught up in the morass of bad habits, it is difficult to come out of it. There can never be any self-discipline that ennobles a person's character.

“Don’t those who accept illegal gratification know that those who are forced to give bribe do not have enough even to feed their children. Often bribe are accepted from this class of people. Are we so heartless that we turn our gaze from these facts?

“When I hear at select gatherings of enlightened people that even the Jat officers have succumbed to these evils I hang my head in shame. One’s individual character is an index to the character of that class of people.

“To be able to achieve anything, people must have the following: Simple living, high thinking, nobility of character, honesty and united action.”¹

Onward March

Chhotu Ram lost his electoral battle in 1920, and those who brought about his defeat had resorted to highly objectionable means. After his success in 1923, he remained in politics for over two consecutive decades but never allowed it to become a morally corroded class of power brokers, nor for that matter did he ever encourage those hoodlums who boasted of having enough of money power, muscle power or manpower. Often he was required to repair the cracks in the Party, but his moral uprightness and political manipulation helped him keep it in good health. Minister or no Minister, President of the Council or just a member, head of the Unionist Party or simple worker, all was irrelevant for his ‘samattvam

¹ Letter to Jat officers, Lahore, July 8, 1936

yoga' In what way was he less politically significant than those who aspired after offices? The revolution he brought about in what was once an exploited class of peasant is without a parallel in Indian history. It was a peaceful, bloodless revolution which was acknowledged even by Congressmen like Gandhiji, Rajagopalachari, and others. While the Congress had its own band of leaders and workers, Chhotu Ram did all work single-handed. Anything he laid his hands on was found to be displaying marks of his wisdom and efficiency. He had his own foes, but friends he had only a few. Those who could not get any favour from him often talked of his being a communalist, anarchist, fanatic, but none dare raise an accusing finger against him that he was either corrupt, dishonest, or impolite. On the other hand, the British tended to look upon him as an astute politician determined to bring their hold on the Punjab to an end.

He was good at English, Hindi, Sanskrit and Urdu. Language was malleable in his hands, as was his audience — he took his people skilfully through several troughs and crests of emotion during his speeches. One could almost see him réarranging the building blocks of his speech according to the receptivity of his audience. That was one special reason how he was often able to whip up a groundswell of sympathy for the cause dearest to his heart and soul. To his people he often brought the message that their basic needs for land reforms and rural credit were ever on the top of his agenda.

At the same time he warned that high growth rate was necessarily not a substitute for deliberate policies to ensure equitable distribution of the gains of economic development. It was evident to political analysts of those days that by having

brought about agrarian reforms and planned the Bhakra Dam to provide perennial source of irrigation he was thinking far ahead of his times, a necessary trait of a statesman's mind.

It was Chhotu Ram who wanted to usher in an age of political morality, and that was his beginning with the Unionist Party. He was dead set against a degraded society morally, intellectually and politically. In the absence of moral values, politics, he said becomes criminalized, giving rise to land mafias, liquor barons, smugglers, hoarders, black marketers, contract killers. He is sure to break loose on such societies. To quote here the following lines of an English poet, Oliver Goldsmith;

Ill far the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay;
Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade,
A breath can make them, as breath had made;
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroyed, can never be supplied.

Political Idealism

Chhotu Ram always believed that the inner and the outer aspects of a man's life must correspond with each other. And this means that the private and public sides of one's personality must not be mutually exclusive of each other. Such a controversy arose when some politicians, found guilty of crimes like sexual harassment, defended themselves by saying that it was in their personal life, and that in their public life they were transparent and, therefore, not legally guilty. But Chhotu Ram's contention was that there cannot be any

distinction between the legal and the moral — that what is not moral could not be considered politically right. This is double -dealing, and does not stand the test of reason. This was the reason why he took care to see that his political realism did not deflect into an ideology of opportunism. And this, by the way, is the bane of much of our contemporary politics. ‘Aya Rams’ and ‘Gaya Rams’ have vitiated the atmosphere so much that politics has lost much of its sanctity. While introducing his agrarian bills and then defending them on the floor of the House required standing some times, even for hours, and the opposition levelled unfounded, baseless allegations, but never did he think it politically appropriate to pay his opponents in the same coin. Underlying all his pronouncements and promises there were considerations of moral values which he always kept close to his conscience.

Political corruption, in Chhotu Ram’s view, was a blatant misuse of the trust reposed by the electorates in their elected representatives. Those who fall into this category are ‘those few individuals who have a variety of houses to live in, one at Lahore, another in the countryside, and a third house at Simla. “On the contrary, there is the majority of those ‘teeming millions’ who are strangers to two square meals a day.”

It was because of his political sagacity that he took care of all the poor sections of the society — be they peasants, artisans, daily wage earners or factory workers. He ensued for these classes of people separate laws, such as giving them a weekly off, fixed hours of work, medical aid in case of illness, regular payment of salaries or wages, etc.

Chhotu Ram hated authoritarianism as much as the alien rule. Never did he seek to bend the laws for himself or for any of his favourites, and always tried to show to others the dignity of the law which, as he often said, was impersonal and inviolable. It was ever as a Minister his policy to ensure that an officer was not harassed in any way. Efficiency, honesty and transparency were the hallmark of his administration.

Recognition, at last

Chhotu Ram had made his way into the public life even while a lawyers in the Rohtak courts, Fearless and frank, even to the point of being misunderstood, he rode straight to his plans. The Jat High School at Rohtak was his first step, and formulations of plans to protect the poor zamindars against the moneylenders remained with him as his abiding concern. He knew how he could materialize his plans, but he was wise enough to go slow. At one time thing went so much against him that he was recommended for deportation, at another his newly started publication, *Jat Gazette*, was to be closed by an order of the district magistrate still, at another time he was implicated in a murder case. Even his legal partner by himself Lal Chand, was not with him wholeheartedly yet he had to wade his way and finalize plans, all of his own liking.

But he continued with dogged perseverance, hoping to reach his goal sooner or later. He passed through thick and thin, undaunted, unfettered. The British bureaucracy had at last prepared itself to recognize the wonderful work he had done to emancipate peasantry from the economic slavery of the moneylenders. The Golden Acts were so carefully formulated and so skilfully got through in the Assembly that

every body was highly impressed and congratulated for his wonderful work. Equally impressive was the way he handled Jinnah and sent him back to Delhi with nothing in hand. Lord Linlithgo, the Viceroy, was all praise for him and wrote to Punjab Governor, Bertrand James Glancy: "I have a high opinion of Chhotu Ram's ability and courage, and I dare say that he would make a very good member". The Governor fully endorsed the Viceroy and wrote back to say: "In point of ability, application and the courage in expressing his opinion, I think Sir Chhotu Ram is admirably fitted to be a member." One thing need, however, to be said here. The English administrators reorganized the qualities of a person before he was considered for any office. This recognition came in 1937 when Chhotu Ram was knighted. When some one asked him how he had accepted this honour, his simple reply was: 'I gladly accepted if one gives me anything with a friendly gesture.'

As we have said before, Chhotu Ram had politely declined the offer of premiership of Jammu and Kashmir state; and equally he declined the offer of membership of the Viceroy's Executive Council. But he could not give up his single point programme - liberation of peasantry through legislation— and all else, to repeat once more, had no value for him.

Relevance in Contemporary History

It might sound queer if we say that Chhotu Ram's spirit is still alive in most policies and programmes that the governments after independence have been pursing. In what

follows it will be our endeavour to show how far our contention is meaningful.

The highly thought-provoking measures Chhotu Ram took as Development Minister found their echo in the political circles of the adjoining provinces like the Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, etc. The various agrarian laws were closely studied and attempts were made to see if they could in any meaningful sense be used in their own provinces. The general impression had gained credence that they covered each and every aspect of peasantry's life and could serve as models in formulating new enactments.

Uttar Pradesh (UP) was much like Punjab at least in one important respect. While in Punjab there were moneylenders to suck the peasants' blood, in U.P. there were big landlords (zamindars) who owned big estates and carried on their agricultural operations on a large scale. They distributed their landholdings amongst various sections of people, called *muzaras*. The landlords put them to every kind of work on their farms, but kept them at the level of bare subsistence. Even their families were given work, but wages were low.

Soon after independence in 1947 the UP Congress Government turned its attention to the prevalent zamindari system. An act was passed in the Assembly to bring this to an end, called the Zamindari Abolition Law. The land was given to the tenants and the landlords were paid compensation in lieu of their landholdings. The tenants became the owners and this proved a milestone in the way of ensuring food self-sufficiency.

It will also be recalled that Chhotu Ram had ordered allotment of three thousand acres of land to members of the Harijan community (kamins) at a time when new lands were being developed and brought under cultivation. The lands that were taken away from the big landlords in UP were now to be allotted to members of the Harijan community. This was done in almost all the provinces, the noble move being to make the landless the landowners, so as to bring them on par with others socially and, so far as possible, economically too.

It was also planned by some individuals to ask the big landlords to donate part of their landed property voluntarily for further distribution among the Harijans. Vinoba Bhave took up this work as a measure to bring about national integration. He toured many states, and many large-hearted zamindars parted with landholdings which were given to the landless, right on the spot. They were later given certificates of ownership of the landholdings.

Chhotu Ram had pleaded for remission of landrevenue while yet a non-official member of the Assembly. It was his plea that landowners paying landrevenue between Rs. 5 to 25 be exempted from payment of landrevenue. He did not want to extend this concession beyond this limit, for he did not want that big landlords should benefit from this measure. Later in Haryana the landrevenue was completely waived off.

In its recent decision the Congress Government at the Centre has come out with what it proposes to all the Debt Relief Fund. A sum of rupees one crore has been pledged as the initial investment. This is over and above the provision made in the package to waive off all debit liability of peasantry. These are just temporary measures, meant to tide over the

present crisis. For Chhotu Ram, there were two sides of this picture: one depicting moneylenders as the suckers of peasant's blood, and the other represented by peasantry. He first got a number of legislations passed to bring the greedy moneylenders into the legal fold. It was not easy to achieve complete success over their activities; but after some time they had ceased to be arbitrary in their dealings with the peasants. His next point was the peasantry for whom he brought out three Bills - The Relief of Indebtedness Act, the Restitution of Mortgaged Lands Act, and the Debtors' Protection Act. These were, in our opinion, empowerment laws. The result was that soon the peasants in Punjab became aware of their plight, recognized their rights and regained what they had lost. Chhotu Ram ensured that all loopholes were tightly plugged, so that the moneylenders could not exploit the situation.

At one stage a suggestion was mooted that the debts of the peasants be cleared from the exchequer. Chhotu Ram vehemently opposed the move. He had his own reasons. He was firmly convicted that, if the suggestion was accepted, it could be a very bad precedent. This could be a recurring problem when every year the peasants could put forward their claim to complete waiving off their debts. He also feared that loan waiving scheme could be used as promoting vote bank politics. It was also on his agenda that the peasant be given irrigation and credit facilities, so that he learns to be self-sufficient.

As we know, Chhotu Ram was a staunch Arya Samajist and did not believe in differentiation between man and man on grounds of religion. The Punjab was a province where three

main communities Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs with their own religious beliefs lived harmoniously. Religion, Chhotu Ram said, is an individual's own property and is absolutely irrelevant in politics. This is the ideal of secularism which Chhotu Ram in his political life agenda consistently followed. He was unhappy the communalism should be the political agenda of an individual or a party. Once he wrote in the *Tribune*: "The best solution of the problem is the introduction of joint electorates and formation of non-communal parties based on economic interests both inside and outside legislature. This will divest communalism of the main force of its appeal and will strengthen in men's minds the natural process of thinking in the political sphere in terms of their secular interests, rather than of their community. The concept of the state has by now been thoroughly secularized in all progressive countries of the world."²

In its 21st September, 1927 issue of the *Jat Gazette* the main headline read: "In politics religion should have no interference" (politics mein mazhab ka koi dakhal nahin hona chahiye). What needs to be noted here, however, is the fact that no one inside or outside the House ever accused Chhotu Ram of being a communalist. That is why Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs respected and praised him. Secularism, he held is the unmistakable sign of a rational mind.

² SCR., p. 84

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Sir Chhotu Ram is known for planning and executing agrarian reforms in the undivided Punjab during 1920-45. He provided free legal counselling to landless peasants. The reforms carried out by him have not ceased to be relevant even today.

A zealous defender of country's unity and integrity, he once remarked that a divided country is prone to destruction. He warned that partition would irretrievably damage the society and destroy the entire way of life. The country later witnessed the tragic outcome of that failure of collective human wisdom, foresight and understanding!

The author, an educationist, has authored several books on philosophy, religion, parapsychology and history.



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